



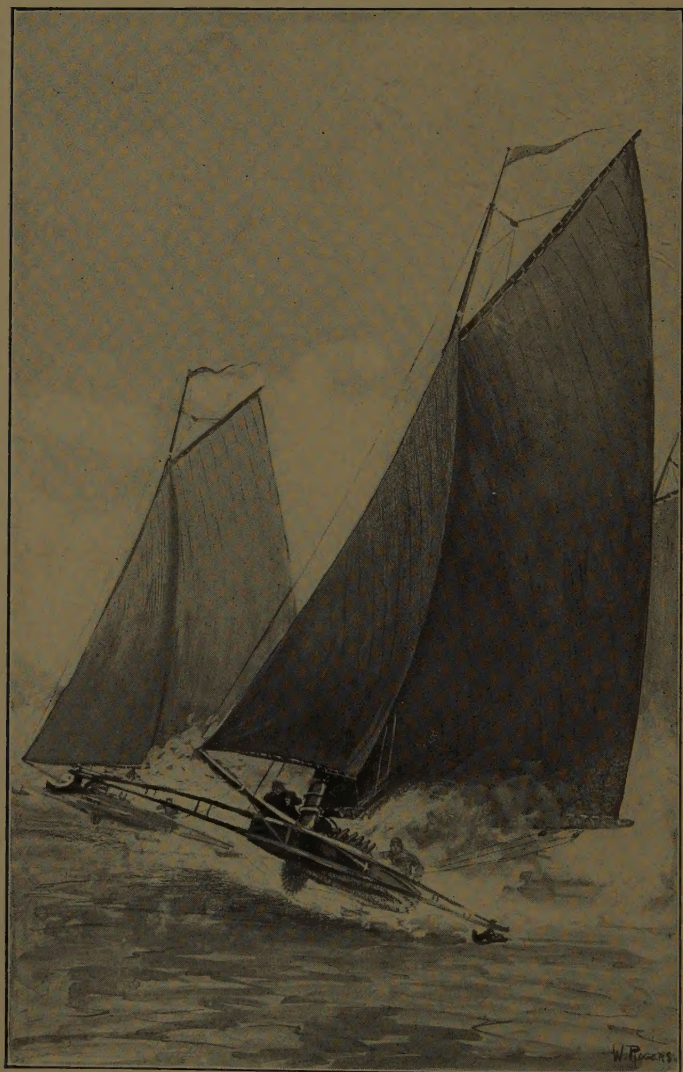
THE
SPEEDWELL
AND
THEIR
ICE RACER
BOYS



ROY
ROCKWOOD

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UNDER THE PRESSURE OF BOTH WIND AND CLAW-WHEEL,
SHE HIT ONLY THE HIGH PLACES.
Speedwell Boys and Their Ice Racer.

The Speedwell Boys and Their Ice Racer

Or

Lost in the Great Blizzard

BY

ROY ROCKWOOD

AUTHOR OF "THE SPEEDWELL BOYS ON MOTORCYCLES," "THE
DAVE DASHAWAY SERIES," "THE GREAT
MARVEL SERIES," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY
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BY ROY ROCKWOOD

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LOST ON THE MOON

ON A TORN-AWAY WORLD

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THE SPEEDWELL BOYS AND THEIR ICE RACER

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ON THE ROAD AND ON THE ICE	I
II. A BIG IDEA	11
III. MORE THAN ONE MYSTERY	21
IV. THE "FLY-UP-THE-CREEK"	30
V. WINGED STEEL	38
VI. GETTING INTO TRIM	46
VII. OUT ON THE ROAD	55
VIII. THE PLANS	64
IX. THE BOY WHO COULDN'T TALK	70
X. COASTING	79
XI. A HAIR'S BREADTH FROM DEATH	88
XII. THE "FOLLOW ME"	96
XIII. THE STRANGER	101
XIV. GATHERING TROUBLE	109
XV. ON ISLAND NUMBER ONE	117
XVI. THE UNEXPECTED	127
XVII. IN THE DEN	137
XVIII. AN EVENING DRIVE	144
XIX. LOST IN THE BLIZZARD	152
XX. "NEVER SAY DIE!"	161

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXI. THE CRY FOR HELP . . .	169
XXII. THE BATTLE IN THE SNOW . .	174
XXIII. DUMMY "GETS IN GOOD" . .	181
XXIV. "IT'S A RINGER!" . . .	190
XXV. BEATING THE "STREAK O' LIGHT"	197

THE SPEEDWELL BOYS AND THEIR ICE RACER

CHAPTER I

ON THE ROAD AND ON THE ICE

"CRICKEY! this is some snow, Dan. Never saw it come so fast in my life," declared Billy Speedwell earnestly, as his brother rolled the heavy cans of milk out of the cooling room at Fifield's,

Their new motor-truck, in which the boys picked up the milk from the various dairies under contract to Mr. Speedwell, stood near. One at a time the brothers lifted the heavy cans and tossed them into the wagon.

"You'll likely see a lot more snow before *this* winter's over, Billy," grunted the older lad, as the last can was placed.

"If it gets deep in the roads we may have to go back to using Bob and Betty and the old delivery wagons."

"Not much!" exclaimed Dan, with confidence. "We've got seventy horses in this old engine; that ought to push her through the drifts."

"We'll have to put the chains on her tires be-

2 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

fore we start out to-morrow morning—unless I miss my guess. This is going to be some snow,” remarked Billy.

“According to the almanac,” his brother responded, “we’re going to have many big storms this winter and lots of ice. Why! there’s a regular blizzard due before Christmas.”

“Well, I like the winter,” declared Billy. “But if the Colasha stays frozen over we’ll not use the *Red Arrow* again till spring.”

“No; I suppose not.”

“And with the roads deep in snow we won’t do much fast riding on either our *Flying Feathers*, or our racing-auto.”

“Oh! there’ll be good weather for motor-car races yet.”

“That’s so,” cried Billy. “I guess we can get a bit of fun out of the old car, eh?”

“We’ll try,” agreed Dan, who was just as much of a motor enthusiast as his younger brother.

Billy had hopped in and taken the wheel. The motor was singing beneath them and in a moment the electric truck lurched forward and they slid out of the Fifield yard.

When they turned into the road, heading for home, the wind and snow struck them with all their force.

“Some storm!” Billy muttered, with set teeth, and trying to peer ahead.

The lamps did little good in such a smother. The flakes whipped into his face and clung to his goggles. Again and again he wiped away the accumulated moisture with his mittened hand—thereby blurring his sight for a moment entirely.

It was just after one of these attempts to clear his vision that the accident happened. The truck was steaming along at a good clip, for the Speedwells were anxious to get home to shelter and a warm supper.

Dan shouted and seized his brother's shoulder. The latter felt the jar as the mudguard struck the dim figure that he had only seen when the truck was right upon it.

Down went the foot passenger, who had been plowing against the storm, too, deaf and blind to the motor-truck. Billy shouted, but was not too excited to stop the motor and brake the car.

He leaped into the gathering snow on one side, while Dan left the truck on the other. Fortunately the wayfarer had been flung aside; the wheels had not passed over him.

"He must be badly hurt, Dan!" gasped Billy, in great distress, on his knees beside the fallen figure.

"Does he move?"

"I—I can't tell. Try it, Dannie," choked the younger Speedwell. "I—I'm afraid to do so."

Dan had the wrist of the unfortunate in his

4 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

own bare fingers. "His pulse is all right," he said.

Just then the unknown stirred and muttered. What he said neither of the Speedwells could understand; but they were both delighted. Certainly the victim of the accident was far from dead!

"Who are you? Are you hurt?" asked Dan.

The other made a strange sound—it was as though he said several words, but they were unlike any speech the boys had ever heard before.

"He can't be intoxicated; can he?" gasped Billy.

"Why, he's only a boy!" declared Dan, dragging the unknown into a sitting posture in the snow.

"There's a cut along his cheek. See! it's bleeding."

Billy brought out his handkerchief and wiped the blood away. The mysterious youth—he wasn't as old as Dan—tried to speak again. The sounds that issued from his lips were so strange that the younger Speedwell was startled.

"I never heard the like, Dan!" he gasped.

"Is he some kind of a foreigner?"

"It doesn't sound human," drawled Dan.

"He must be a stranger from Mars."

But it was not altogether a joke, although the youth now staggered to his feet with the aid of

the brothers, one on either side. He had been much shaken, it was evident. His cheek still bled, and he seemed strangely weak.

"Come along home with us, old man," Dan said, patting him on the shoulder. "We'll see what's the matter with you there."

The stranger seemed to understand. Although he could not speak intelligibly, it was plain that he understood what the Speedwells said to him. And he did not lack intelligence—Dan and Billy were sure of *that*. His eyes were bright and he wasn't at all dazed. The blow had knocked him out for only a minute.

They helped him into the seat and again Billy started the truck. The snow whirled down upon them faster and faster; but this time there was no stop made until they turned in at the Speedwell gate and the outline of the big barn and cow stables loomed before them.

Dan hurried the strange youth into the kitchen, where the odorous steam of supper attacked them cheerfully as soon as the outer door was opened.

"What *is* the matter?" cried Mrs. Speedwell, who was a motherly person, as soon as she saw her older son and the strange boy. "Is he hurt? Who is he, Daniel?"

"I don't believe he's badly hurt, Mother," explained Dan. "But he doesn't seem able to tell——"

6 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

Again the unknown mumbled something. His eyes roved eagerly toward the table, already laid with a bountiful repast.

"I know he's hungry," exclaimed Mrs. Speedwell. "Let him wash his face and hands, Daniel, and sit down at once."

The strange boy could do that. Carrie brought a bottle of antiseptic and little 'Dolph stood by and watched the stranger in childish curiosity. In a few moments Billy and their father came in, and then all sat down to the table.

The visitor was undeniably hungry. Adolph could scarcely eat his own supper he was so greatly interested in seeing the unknown youth "mow away" the heaping plateful good-natured Mr. Speedwell put before him.

"Why!" declared Mrs. Speedwell, "that young fellow was pretty near starved. And he's only a boy, too! What can his folks be thinking of——?"

The visitor looked at her, smiled, and nodded. He tried to say something, too, but it was such a jumble of sounds that they all looked amazed, and even the boys' father shook his head.

"That certainly beats *me!*" he exclaimed. "What do you think he means, Mother?"

"I am sure I do not know. But we must find out about him. He ought not to be wandering around alone."

"On a night like this, too!" from Dan.

"Oh, we'll put him up," said Billy, quickly.

"Won't we, Mom?"

"Surely, my son," agreed his mother.

"Maybe he is some kind of a foreigner," said Carrie, the boys' sister.

"Sounds more like hog-Latin," chuckled Billy, to his brother.

"Sh! he can understand English well enough, even if he doesn't speak it plainly," said the older boy.

"Guess you are right there," agreed Billy.

The entire family was deeply interested in the youth. He had been hungry indeed; and when supper was finished he appeared sleepy, too.

"No knowing how far he had tramped in the snow and storm before you boys ran across him," Mr. Speedwell observed.

"We didn't exactly run across him," Billy said, with a chuckle. "But we come pretty near it, Dad. Too near for comfort."

At any rate, Mrs. Speedwell and Carrie prepared a room for the stranger. He had a suit of Dan's pajamas to sleep in, and little 'Dolph had become so friendly with him that he insisted on the visitor's taking to bed with him one of Adolph's newest and most precious toys—an air-gun.

The visitor retired after saying something that

8 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

must have been a grateful response to Mrs. Speedwell's kindness.

"By gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Speedwell, slapping his knee, "that surely sounds like English—only he mumbles it so. Sounds just as though he were tongue-tied."

"He surely isn't dumb," agreed Dan.

"Not at all," Billy added. "But I never heard anybody as tongue-tied as all *that*."

The Speedwells were not late to bed—especially on such a night as this. The wind howled and the snow continued until midnight; but when the alarm clock awoke Billy and Dan in their room at two o'clock, the storm had ceased and a faint strip of moon was struggling amidst the breaking clouds.

The snow was not too deep for the auto-truck, although the brothers could not get over their long route as quickly as usual. School was in session and Dan and Billy put in full time every school day, in spite of the milk delivery.

They were spinning out the river road towards Colonel Sudds's place, beyond the Darringford Machine Shops, about half past seven, with only a few more customers to deliver to, when Billy caught sight of something on the river that interested him immensely.

"Look at that flyer, Dan!" he cried. "Ice-boat, sure as you are an inch high!"

"I'm several feet more than an inch tall, Billy," chuckled his brother, "so that *must* be an iceboat and no hallucination."

"Don't pull any of the 'high brow stuff,' as Biff Hardy calls it," returned slangy Billy Speedwell. "And tell me, pray, who owns an iceboat around Riverdale?"

"I didn't even suppose the ice was thick enough to bear a boat," returned Dan, who was quite as surprised at the appearance of the swooping craft as his brother.

The river bank fell abruptly from the edge of the road. Dan had brought the truck to a halt, for both boys were immensely interested.

Anything that flew like that craft on the ice below, was bound to hold the attention of the brothers. They were well named, their chums at the Riverdale Academy declared. Billy Speedwell had never yet traveled fast enough to suit him, and Dan was just as much of a "speed maniac."

However, Dan's natural caution usually kept the brothers from reckless racing of any kind; but they had won prizes and made records with their motorcycles, racing car, and motorboat.

Now they stared hard at the craft flying down the river toward the buildings belonging to the Colasha Boat Club. The ice was firm in patches, but from this height the Speedwells could

10 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

see that there were open strips of water, yards in width.

The tides did not affect the river much so far from its mouth; yet there was some brine in it and despite the severe cold of the last few days, the ice was not entirely safe.

"Two fellows in her," announced Billy.

"I see 'em."

"And just as reckless as they can be. See there! Don't they see that channel ahead? My goodness, Dan! It's fifty feet wide if it is a foot!"

"You're right, Billy; they're going to have a spill!"

"Worse than that," cried the younger brother, and he hopped out of his seat. "Come on, Dan! there's going to be something doing down there in another minute. We're going to be needed——"

He halted in his speech, for at that very moment the skimming iceboat shot over the edge of the firm ice, its runners cut through the shell-like crystal beyond, and the heavy body of the boat splashed into the open water.

It's momentum carried it far; but only the front runner hit the ice on the other side of the open channel. The runner slipped under the firm ice, and the careening boat stopped. With a crash heard plainly up on the highroad, the mast went by the board, and the craft and its passengers disappeared under the falling canvas.

CHAPTER II

A BIG IDEA

DAN and Billy Speedwell, now seventeen and sixteen years of age respectively, were, as has been observed, famous in the county as speed experts. In "The Speedwell Boys on Motorcycles" are related several of their first speed trials at the Compton Motordrome and on the road, and in the second volume of the series, "The Speedwell Boys and Their Racing Auto," is told the winning of a thousand-mile endurance test.

The brothers later obtain possession of a motorboat and adventures connected with the great regatta of the Colasha Boat Club are narrated in "The Speedwell Boys and Their Power Launch," and in the fourth volume, entitled "The Speedwell Boys in a Submarine," the brothers are two of an adventurous party that find a submerged wreck and the treasure aboard it.

The boys' father had been merely a small dairyman and farmer, and the boys had to work hard between school sessions to help him. By certain

12 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

fortuitous circumstances they had been enabled to obtain motorcycles, a racing auto, and a power launch; but the disposal of the recovered treasure had made the Speedwell family quite independent.

Something like twenty thousand dollars had been wisely invested for Dan and Billy, and in addition they were able to help their father increase his business and give the family many luxuries which had before been beyond their reach.

As we have seen, however, the Speedwells lived plainly and were busy and industrious folk. The brothers went to school faithfully and helped as they had for several years in the delivery of the milk to their father's customers in and about Riverdale.

The interest of the two boys in the career of the strange iceboat had brought them to a halt on the river road. Dan and Billy were both descending the steep bank at breakneck speed before the fall of the mast spelled utter ruin to the ice craft.

"They'll be drowned, Dan!" gasped Billy, hurrying on the slippery path.

"They'll be mighty wet—that's sure," returned the older boy. "Hold on, Billy! Let's take some of these rails. We'll need 'em."

It was always Dan who thought the more clearly. Billy was as brave as a young lion; but

he lacked his brother's judgment and caution. He would have gone empty-handed to the rescue of the victims of the wreck; but Dan saw ahead.

The boys immediately tore down a couple of lengths of rail fence which here marked the boundary of some old pasture. With the rails on their shoulders they hurried on.

Just then a faint cry for help came from the half-submerged iceboat. Billy returned a shout of encouragement as he and Dan hurried to get around the open stretch of water.

When the boys leaped down upon the ice they chose a firm spot for their attempt. They were able to run right out toward the middle of the river (which was here at least two miles wide) without venturing upon any thin ice. Their principal peril was from holes hidden by the heaped-up snow of the night before.

The weight of this snow had broken down great patches of ice, leaving open places like this into which the iceboatmen had fallen. And there had been a very high tide not four hours before, which had raised the level of the Colasha River even as far up-stream as this point.

Naturally the ice—not yet very thick—had given way in many places. The two on the wrecked boat had been very reckless indeed.

This was no time to tell them so, however. Dan and Billy went to work in the most approved

fashion to reach the half-frozen castaways clinging to the out-rigger of the ice craft.

"Keep up your pluck! We're coming!" yelled Billy.

"So—so's—Christmas!" stammered one of the castaways.

"Crickey!" gasped Billy. "That's Monroe Stevens—sure's you live, Dan!"

The Speedwells had cast the fence rails on the ice in a criss-cross fashion and now Dan was creeping out upon the frail platform thus made, to the very thin ice. He said:

"If he was going to be hanged the next minute, Monroe would joke. Hi, there! Save your breath to cool your porridge, Monroe! Who's with you?"

"B-b-barry Spink," chattered young Stevens. "Don't y-y-you know—know Barrington Spink, Dan? Lem-lem-lemme present you."

This introduction seemed a little unnecessary, for the next moment Dan Speedwell seized Barrington Spink by the wrist and fairly "yanked" him out of the water. Young Spink was all but helpless from cold and exhaustion.

As Dan backed away from the hole, dragging Spink with him, Billy swarmed over them both and seized upon Monroe Stevens.

"Hold tight, old man," he cried. "We'll get you out."

"All—all right," chattered Stevens. "But d-d-don't be too-o-o long about it, Billy. They certainly for—for—forgot to heat th—this bawth!"

Billy clutched him tightly by the collar and in a few moments he felt Dan tugging at his own heels. Barry Spink was lying, panting, on the ice—but fast freezing to it, for the thermometer was still far down the scale.

"Come on! come on!" gasped Billy, when the four of them were on their feet. "Let's get where there's a fire."

"Y—y—you bet!" agreed Monroe Stevens. "I—I never was so shivery in—in all—all my life!"

Spink could hardly speak. But he moaned occasionally something about the lost iceboat, which he called the *White Albatross*.

"Goodness knows!" chattered Stevens, "we deserved to lose the silly thing. I knew better than to try her out to-day—and I—I told you so, Barry."

"I didn't know there was an iceboat on the river," said Dan, as they all climbed the steep hill to the road and the waiting motor car.

"It—it was the only one on the Colasha," mumbled Spink.

"We've been building it on the q. t., Dannie," exclaimed Stevens, grinning. "And she certainly

could travel some. We got one on you and Billy that time."

"You seem to have got one on yourselves," returned Dan, grimly.

"Didn't you know enough to wait till the river really froze over, Money?" questioned Billy, with some disgust.

"Aw, that Barry!" grumbled young Stevens. "He was crazy to try her out. And we got up this morning before sun-up. Sure, she whizzed——"

"We were watching you come down the river," admitted Dan.

"Say! couldn't she travel?" exclaimed Stevens.

"You bet," agreed Billy. "How far up the Colasha did you go?"

"Went around Island Number One——"

"And we'd been all right," snarled Barry Spink, who seemed to take an interest in affairs for the first time, "if it hadn't been for that dummy. He put the jinx on us."

"The jinx!" exclaimed Billy, laughing.

But Dan had noticed something else, and he repeated, curiously: "'Dummy?' What d'ye mean—dummy?"

They had reached the motor-truck and Billy hustled the half-drowned youths into the seat and bundled them up in the robe and blankets while Dan started the motor.

"Back to the fire house—eh, Dan?" he asked his brother, as he slid under the wheel.

"The boiler room at the shops is nearer. They'll take 'em in and dry them," advised the older Speedwell.

"I—I don't care where in the world you take us as—as long's it's *hot*," wailed Barrington Spink.

"But how about this 'dummy'?" demanded Dan, of Monroe Stevens.

"Why, we had stopped at Island Number One and were repairing the rudder, when along come this feller who couldn't talk."

"Couldn't talk?" cried Billy, waking up to the coincidence, too, and looking at Dan, amazed. "Why! there must be two of them."

"Two what?" queried Stevens.

"You called him a dummy. Is he really dumb?"

"He mumbled something or other when we asked him to help us," explained Monroe; "but it wasn't anything *human*. And Barry declared it was bad luck to meet a dummy."

"And so it is!" snapped young Spink. "Doesn't *this* prove it?"

"Funny about there being two fellows who act like dummies being at large," remarked Dan to Billy.

"I should say so," agreed the younger brother.

18 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

"Say, Money! where'd *your* dummy go to when he wouldn't help you chaps?"

"He was comin' across from the mainland, and he went up into the woods on Island Number One. I bet he's stopping there," answered Stevens.

"Nonsense! there's nothing on that island. No hut, nor any shelter. Bet he was going right along across the river."

"Well, he didn't go on while we were up that way, for when we got the *White Albatross* fixed, we sailed around the island and come down on the far side—and the snow lay all along the edge of the island there, and there wasn't a footprint in it. Oh! here's the shops. My goodness! won't it be—be go-o-od to get next to—a fire," chattered Stevens.

When the Speedwells had seen the shivering castaways humped upon stools before the boilers, they hurried away to deliver the remainder of their bottled milk. On the way to Colonel Sudds's Dan said:

"What do you think of this 'dummy' they talk about, Billy?"

"Funny. Wonder if he's the twin of the one we've got at our house?"

"Question is, *have* we got him at our house?" returned Dan, thoughtfully.

"Pshaw! the folks wouldn't let him leave so

soon. If he was at Island Number One so early, he must have left our house soon after we did," declared Billy. "And that isn't troubling me," he added.

"What is?" asked his brother, smiling.

"Why—it's no trouble. Not really. But there is something that is buzzing in my head, Dan."

"I knew there was a bee in your bonnet," chuckled his elder.

"Oh, you did? How smart you are! But I don't believe you can guess what sort of a bee it is?"

"No-o. Some new idea, I reckon?"

"You bet it is, old man!" declared Billy, with enthusiasm. "And a big idea, too."

"Let's have it," urged the older Speedwell.

"Well! you know about this Barry Spink; don't you?"

"I know he's not long in Riverdale."

"Yes. But where he comes from?"

"Up the Hudson somewhere."

"Cricky! that's just it," cried Billy, with rising excitement. "Up where he has lived the winters are long and hard. The rivers and lakes freeze over usually in November, and stay frozen until February or March. And I bet that fellow knows all about iceboating."

"Don't you tell him so," advised Dan, with a

grin. "He's got a swelled head as it is—I can see that."

"Never mind, Spink. That isn't exactly what I mean—not what *he* knows. But he and his busted iceboat have put something into my head, old man."

"Out with it, boy."

"It's just this: Let's go in for an iceboat ourselves. Let's get the fellows of the Outing Club interested—and maybe some of the girls, too—Mildred, and Lettie, and some of the others. And we'll have races, and all that."

"If the ice gets thick enough and 'stays put,' " suggested Dan, slowly.

"You said yourself last night," Billy declared, quickly, "that the almanac man promised a real winter this time."

"And we're getting a piece of it right now. Jinks! maybe you've got a big idea, Billy."

"Sure I have. And if that chump, Barry Spink, can build a boat as good as that *White Albatross*, what's the matter with us building a better?"

"Now you're talking," agreed his brother, with growing enthusiasm. "Hustle now, Billy! there goes the first bell. We've only just time to get the truck under the shed and hustle into school. Got my books with yours? Come on, then," and the Speedwells hurried off to the academy.

CHAPTER III

MORE THAN ONE MYSTERY

THE two reckless youths who had tried out the iceboat and lost her that morning did not appear at the academy during the forenoon session. Indeed, Barrington Spink was not an attendant at the Riverdale school.

He was a recent comer to the town and the boys knew very little about him, save in a general way. He was the son of a widowed lady who seemed to have a superabundance of cash and who was very proud and haughty.

Mrs. Spink had bought a large house on the outskirts of Riverdale, had furnished it gaudily, hired a host of servants, repainted and refurbished everything about the place, including the iron dog on the lawn, and had set up a carriage and pair as well as an automobile.

The Speedwells had often seen Barrington Spink around town before the occasion when Billy had hauled him out of the icy river, but had never spoken to him. Monroe Stevens belonged to one of the wealthiest families in Riverdale and

naturally Spink had gravitated toward "Money," as the other boys called Monroe.

After school was out and Dan and Billy were walking across the square towards Appleyard's to get the truck (they had not gone home at noon) they came face to face with the newcomer to Riverdale.

He was with Wiley Moyle and Fisher Greene, both of the so-called "aristocracy" of Riverdale, but good fellows both of them and Billy's particular friends.

"Say, Billy," remarked Fisher, grinning, "Barry here has just been telling us how you pulled him out of the river this morning. The chill hasn't got out of him yet, you see," he added, with a meaning glance at young Spink, who had nodded very distantly in return for the Speedwells' hearty greeting.

"He was just asking us about you," drawled Wiley Moyle, "and we told him that Riverdale would have to go without lacteal fluid in its coffee if it wasn't for you and Dan."

"And our cows," replied Billy, seriously. "They have something to do with the milk supply, I assure you."

"And the barn pump—I know," chuckled Wiley, grinning saucily.

"Oh—I—say," stammered Spink, eyeing Billy rather askance. Dan and some of the older boys were discussing an important topic some distance

away. "I didn't suppose you fellows really made a chum of this—er—Speedwell boy."

"Huh?" grunted Wiley. Wiley's folks were rich enough, but his father made him earn most of his own spending money, and Wiley helped around Jim Blizzard's newspaper office on Saturdays and after school. "I knew you were a chump, Barry; but this——"

"Oh, I'm obliged enough to him, I'm sure," said Spink, airily. "He certainly helped me out of the river."

He had been fumbling in his pocket while he spoke and now brought out a little flat packet of folded bills. Selecting one, he approached Billy Speedwell, who, having first flushed at the fellow's impudent tone, was now grinning as broadly as Wiley and Fisher.

"Re'lly," said young Spink, "you did that very bravely, Speedwell. Here is a little—er—something to show my appreciation."

Billy had accepted the dollar bill and at once fished up a handful of silver from the depths of his trousers' pocket.

"Hold on! hold on, Mr. Spink!" he exclaimed. "If you mean to pay me with this for saving your life, there is no need of overpaying me. Here! there's ninety-five cents change—count it. And I'm not sure that I'm not charging you too much as it is."

Fisher and Wiley Moyle burst into a roar of

laughter, and Barrington Spink turned several different colors, as he realized that Billy had made him look like a goose.

"Why—why—— That fellow's only a *milk-man*," sputtered Spink, as Billy drifted over to the bigger crowd of boys to hear what was afoot.

"You give me a pain in my solar plexus—you gump!" snapped Fisher Greene. "Why, Billy and Dan have got twenty thousand dollars or more in their own right. Didn't you ever hear of the treasure of Rocky Cove? Well, those are the boys who got the emeralds—they, and the old Admiral and Mr. Asa Craig. You want to take a tumble to yourself, Barry Spink!" and he moved away from the new boy.

Barrington Spink's eyes fairly bulged. "He—he's kiddin' me; isn't he?" he demanded of the grinning Wiley.

"Not so's you'd notice it," returned Moyle.

"Not twenty thousand dollars?"

"Thereabout."

"And they run a milk route?"

"That's Mr. Speedwell's business. And fellows around Riverdale have to work the same as their dads did when *they* were boys. There are not many drones in this town, let me tell you," concluded Wiley.

He started over to the other boys, too, and

left Spink alone. The new boy was "in bad," and he began to realize that fact. Perhaps he couldn't help being born a snob; having his standards set by a foolish and worldly mother had made Barrington Spink an insufferable sort of fellow.

"The peasantry of this country doesn't know its place," Mrs. Spink often observed. "That is why I so much prefer living in Yurup." That is the way she pronounced it. If the truth were known (but it wasn't—Mrs. Spink saw to that) the lady's father was once a laborer on a railroad; but the mantle of Mr. Spink's family greatness had fallen upon her.

"If it wasn't for Mr. Spink's peculiar will," she often sighed, "I should not venture to contaminate Barrington with the very common people one is forced to meet in this country. But Mr. Spink had peculiar ideas. He left Barrington's guardians no choice. My poor boy must be educated in American schools, doncher know!"

And Barry was getting a fine education! He had shifted from place to place and from school to school, learning about as little as the law allowed, and doing about as he pleased. Now he was so far behind other boys of his age in his studies that he was ashamed to enter the Riverdale Academy until the tutor his mother had engaged whipped Barry's jaded mind into some sort

of alignment with those of the boys who would be his schoolmates.

The boys surrounding Dan Speedwell were enthusiastic and all tried to talk at once. A flock of crows on the edge of a cornfield could have been no more noisy.

"Greatest little old idea ever was sprung!" shouted one.

"Takes the Speedwells to hatch up this 'new thought' stuff," whooped Jim Stetson. "What d'ye say, boys? Tell it!

"Dan! Dan! He's the man!
Dan, Dan Speedwell!"

The yell from the crowd made everybody in the snowy square turn to look; but when they saw the crowd of boys from the academy the spectators merely smiled. Boyish enthusiasm in Riverdale frequently "spilled over," and nobody but Josiah Somes, the constable, minded it—and *he* considered it better to give the matter none of his official attention.

"Meeting to-night, fellows, in the Boat Club house—don't forget!" shouted one of the bigger boys. "We'll give this iceboat scheme the once over."

"It's a great idea," declared Wiley Moyle, enthusiastically. "And they tell me the river

above Long Bridge is already solid as a brick pavement."

"It isn't so solid below the bridge—or it wasn't this morning," chuckled Billy Speedwell. "Mr. Spink can tell us all about *that*."

But Barrington Spink was hurrying rapidly away.

"Why, if the Speedwells have all the money Wiley says they have, they're worth cultivating," he muttered to himself—which is *one* of the mysteries that bothered Dan and Billy during the next few days. They wondered much why Spink's manner should so change toward them. The boy hung about them and tried to make friends with "the milkmen" in every possible way.

The other—and more important mystery—met Dan and Billy when they arrived home that very afternoon. The strange boy that Billy had knocked down the evening before, had disappeared.

"When we got up this morning, after you boys had gone," explained their father, "that fellow had skedaddled. What do you think of that? And without a word!"

"Then Money Stevens may have seen him over by Island Number One!" cried Billy.

"It looks so," admitted Dan. "I didn't think there could be two chaps who couldn't talk, in the neighborhood."

"That's not all, boys," cried Carrie Speedwell. "Just see what little 'Dolph picked up."

She presented a crumpled slip of paper for Dan and Billy to read.

"'Dolph found it right there beside the bed that strange boy slept on. He must have dropped it. See how it reads, Dan?"

Dan read the line scrawled on the paper, aloud:

"Buried on the island. Dummy will show you the spot."

There was no signature, nor address—just the brief line. What it could refer to—what thing was buried, and on what island, was hard to understand. Only, it was quite certain that the "Dummy" referred to was the youthful stranger who could not talk English understandably.

"I am awful sorry he went away without his breakfast," sighed Mrs. Speedwell. "And he didn't look half fed, at best. It is too bad."

"He'll have a fine time living over on Island Number One at this season," whispered Billy to Dan.

"Don't let mother hear you," replied the older boy, quickly. "She'd only worry."

"Better let 'Dummy' do the worrying," chuckled Billy.

"Well! it's mighty odd," said Dan, shaking

his head. "And I really would like to know what's buried on the island."

"So would I," said Billy. "Treasure—eh?"

"You've got treasure on the brain, boy," grinned the older youth. "You're getting mercenary. Haven't you got wealth enough? We're capitalists."

"Yes—I know," said Billy, nodding. "But I wonder if we've got money enough to get us the fastest iceboat that's going to be raced on the Colasha this winter?"

"Ah! now you've said it," agreed Dan. "But it isn't going to be money that will get us *that* boat. We've got to learn something about iceboat building as well as iceboat sailing."

"Huh! that blamed little wisp, Barry Spink," grunted Billy.

"What about him now?" asked Dan, laughing.

"As inconsequential as he is, he's got the whole town 'bug' on iceboating. He'll be all swelled up like a toad."

"We should worry!" returned Dan, with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

CHAPTER IV

THE "FLY-UP-THE-CREEK"

MILDRED KENT, the doctor's daughter, and her closest friend, Lettie Parker, halted the Speedwells at the close of school the next day. Mildred was a very pretty girl and Dan thought she was just about right. As for the sharp-tongued Lettie, she and Billy appeared to be always quarreling—in a good-natured way.

"We want to know what's in the wind, boys?" demanded Mildred, her pretty face framed by a tall sealskin collar and her hands in a big shawl muff.

"There's snow in *this* wind," replied Billy, chuckling, for a few sharp flakes were being driven past the quartette as they stood upon the corner.

"Aren't you smart, Billy Speedwell!" scoffed the red-haired Lettie. "Doesn't it pain you?"

"You bet it does!" agreed Billy, promptly. "But they tell me that you suffer a deal yourself, Miss Parker, from the same complaint."

"Now, children! children!" admonished Mil-

dred. "Can't you be together at all without scrapping?"

"And what about the wind, Mildred?" asked Dan.

"You boys were all down to the Boat Club last night, I hear. What is doing?"

"Aw, don't tell 'em, Dan!" urged Billy, as though he really meant it. "They'll want to play the part of the *Buttinsky Sisters*—you know they will!"

"I like that!" gasped Lettie, clenching her little gloved fist. "Oh! I wish sometimes I was a boy, Billy Speedwell!"

"Gee, Lettie! Isn't it lucky you're not?" he gasped. "There'd be no living in the same town with you. I like you a whole lot better as you are——"

Dan and Mildred laughed, but Lettie was very red in the face still, and not at all pacified, as she declared:

"I believe I'd die content if I could just trounce you once—as you should be trounced!"

"Help! help! Ath-thith-tance, pleath!" begged Billy, keeping just out of the red-haired girl's reach. "If you ever undertook to thrash me, Lettie, I know I'd just be scared to death."

"Come now," urged Mildred. "You are both

delaying the game. And it's cold here on the street corner. I want to know."

"And what do you want to know, Miss?" demanded Billy.

"Why, I can tell you what we did last evening, if that's what you want to know, Mildred," said Dan, easily. "There's nothing secret about it."

"You can't be going to plan any boat races this time of year?" exclaimed Lettie. "The paper says we're going to have a hard winter and the Colasha steamboat line has laid off all its hands and closed up for the season. They say the river is likely to be impassable until spring."

"That's all you know about it," interposed Billy. "We just *did* agree to have boat races on the river last evening. Now, then! what do you think?"

"I think all the Riverdale boys are crazy," returned Lettie, promptly.

"What does he mean, Dan?" asked Mildred.

"Poof! Boat racing! Likely story," grumbled the red-haired girl.

"Now, isn't that the truth, Dan?" demanded Billy, but careful to circle well around Miss Parker to put his brother and Mildred between himself and the county clerk's daughter.

"As far as it goes," admitted Dan, chuckling. "But he doesn't go far enough. We did talk some about having boat races—iceboat races."

"Oh, ho!" cried Lettie. Her eyes flashed and she began to smile again. "Iceboats, Dannie? Really?"

"But I thought they were so dangerous?" demurred Mildred, rather timidly. "Didn't Monroe Stevens and somebody else almost get drowned yesterday morning trying out an iceboat?"

"'Deed they did," admitted Billy. "But the river wasn't fit."

"And you boys got them out of the water, too!" exclaimed Lettie, suddenly. "I heard about it."

"Somebody had to pull 'em out, so why not we?" returned Dan quickly, with perfect seriousness.

"And you boys are going to build another boat?" asked Mildred.

"A dozen, perhaps," laughed Billy.

"We'll build one if nothing happens to prevent—Billy and I," said Dan. "And if the interest continues, and there are enough boats on the river to make it worth while, we'll have a regatta bye and bye."

"An iceboat regatta! Won't that be novel?" cried Mildred.

But Lettie was interested in another phase of it. She demanded: "How big is your boat going to be, Billy?"

"Oh, a good big one," he said, confidently.
"Eh, Dan?"

"We haven't decided on the dimensions. I want to make a plan of her first," Dan said, seriously.

"Well, now! let me tell you one thing," said the decisive Lettie. "You have got to build it big enough to carry four—hasn't he, Mildred?"

"Four what?" demanded Billy.

"Four people, of course. "You're not going to be stingy, Billy Speedwell! You know our mothers wouldn't hear of our sailing an iceboat; but if you boys take us——"

"Ho!" cried Billy. "You don't know what you're talking about, Let!"

"There isn't any place you go, Billy Speedwell, that *I* can't!" cried the red-haired one, who had always been something of a tomboy. "And I'm not afraid to do anything that *you* dare to do—so there!"

"Dear me, Lettie! don't get so excited," advised Mildred. "Do you suppose girls could sail on your iceboat, Dan?"

"Why not? An iceboat is no more dangerous than a sailboat. And I intend to build our boat with a shallow box on the body so that at least two passengers can lie down in it comfortably."

"Lie down in it?" queried Lettie, in a puzzled tone.

"Of course," grunted Billy, "or the boom would knock their silly heads off when the boat comes about. Don't you know?"

"To be sure! 'Low bridge!' I've sailed enough on a catboat to know when to 'duck,' I hope," returned Lettie.

"And we can sail with you, Dan?" Mildred was saying. "Do—do you think it will be safe?"

"Perfectly," replied the older Speedwell. "Not, of course, when we race. We'll carry only ballast, then, and one of us will have to stand on the outrigger to keep the boat from turning turtle——"

"Oh, that sounds dreadfully exciting!" gasped Lettie, her eyes shining.

"It sounds pretty dangerous," observed Mildred. "You two boys are speed crazy, I believe! Burton Poole's got a new car—have you seen it? He says it is a fast one."

"Pooh!" returned Billy. "Burton's got to get up awfully early in the morning to be in the same class with us."

"Never mind the autos," said Mildred, briskly. "We've got what we want, Lettie," and she laughed. "Remember, boys! we're to have first call on your iceboat when it is built."

"Oh, yes! When it is built," said her chum, laughing. "We're all counting our chickens before they're hatched."

"You wait till a week from Saturday, Let," said Billy, with confidence. "By that time we'll have hatched a pretty good-sized chicken—eh, Dan?"

His brother would not promise; but that very night the boys drew plans for the ice racer they intended to build. Mr. Speedwell owned a valuable piece of timber, and the boys always had a few seasoned logs on hand. They selected the sticks they needed, sledded them to the mill, had them sawed right, and then set to work on the big barn floor and worked the sticks down with hand tools.

They even made their own boom, for Mr. Speedwell helped them, and he was a first-class carpenter. The iron work they had made at the local blacksmith shop. The canvas for the sails came from Philadelphia, from a mail order house. Before the middle of the next week the Speedwells carted the new boat down to old John Bromley's dock in sections, put it together on the ice, and John helped them make the sails and bend them, he knowing just how this should be done.

They had a private trial of the boat one afternoon, towards dark, and she worked beautifully. Even Bromely, who had not seen many iceboats and was an old, deep-water sailor was enthusiastic when he saw the craft, with Dan at the helm,

skim across the river, tack beautifully, and return on the wind.

They then started to give her a couple of coats of bright paint.

"What you goin' to call her boys?" Bromley asked.

"Ought to be something with feathers—she's a bird," laughed Billy.

"And we're going to 'hatch' her about as quick as you promised the girls," his brother remarked.

"Barry Spink's is the *White Albatross*—he's going to name it after the boat he and Money wrecked."

"Bird names seem popular," said Dan. "Fisher Green has sent for a craft already built. He showed me the catalog. *His* will be called the *Redbird*."

"Say!" shouted Billy, grinning. "I got it!"

"Let's have it, then," advised his brother.

"What's the matter with the *Fly-up-the-Creek*? There's nothing much quicker on the wing, is there?"

"Bully!" agreed Dan, with an answering smile. "And I bet nobody else on the river will think of *that* for a name. She's christened! *Fly-up-the-Creek* she is. But I wonder what Milly and Lettie will say to that name?"

CHAPTER V

WINGED STEEL

THERE was a moon that week and the nights were glorious. While most of the Riverdale young folk were skating in the Boat Club Cove, the Speedwell brothers were trying out the iceboat each evening, and "learning the ropes."

The proper handling of a craft the size of the one Dan and Billy had built is no small art. With the huge mainsail and jib they had rigged, she could gather terrific speed even when the wind was light. She might better have been called an "ice yacht."

When the ringing steel was skimming the ice at express-train speed, the two boys had to have their wits about them every moment of the time. Dan handled the helm and the sheet, while Billy rode the crossbeam for balance, and to keep the outrigger runner on the ice.

For boys who had entered in semi-professional motorcycle races, and had handled a Breton-Melville racing car, the speed gathered under normal conditions by this sailing iceboat seemed merely ordinary. What she would do in a gale was another matter.

While they had been building the craft just enough rain fell to wash the snow from the roads; and as the frost came sharply immediately upon the clearance of the rainstorm, almost the entire river surface was like glass. The cold was intense, and the Colasha froze solid. The ice-men were cutting eighteen inches at Karnac Lake, it was reported.

There were few airholes between the Long Bridge and the lake (Dan and Billy covered the entire length of the river between those two places) and almost no spots where the swiftness of the current made the ice weak. As for the tides—the ice was too firm now to be affected by ordinary tides above the Boat Club Cove.

As Bromley's dock was above the Long Bridge, few of their mates saw the Speedwells' craft at all. The Speedwell house was within a short distance of John Bromley's and not many of the academy boys and girls lived at this end of Riverdale.

So what the *Fly-up-the-Creek* could do was known only to Dan and Billy. They sailed her one night away up the river, past Meadville, the mills, and the penitentiary, and so on to the entrance to Karnac Lake. It was certainly a great sail.

"Would you believe she'd slide along so rapidly with nothing but a puff of wind now and

then?" gasped Billy, as they tacked and came about for the return run.

"That's all right," Dan returned. "But suppose we got off so far and the wind gave out on us altogether? Wouldn't that be an awful mess?"

"Gee!" exclaimed Billy, laughing. "We ought to have an auxiliary engine on her—eh? How about it, boy?"

"Why, Billy!" exclaimed Dan, "that might not be such a bad idea."

"Wouldn't work; would it?" asked the younger boy, curiously. "I only said that for a joke."

"Well——"

"You're not serious, Dan?" gasped Billy, seeing his brother's thoughtful face.

"I—don't—know——"

"Whoo!" burst out Billy. "You're off on a cloud again, Dan, old boy! Whoever heard of a motor iceboat? Zing!"

"Hits you hard; does it?" chuckled Dan.

"I—should—say! Wouldn't it be 'some pumpkins' to own an engine-driven craft that would make Money, and Spink, and Burton Poole, and all the others that are going in for iceboating, look like thirty cents?"

"I admire your slang, boy," said Dan, in a tone that meant he *didn't* admire it.

"Well, but, Dan! you know that idea is preposterous."

"You're wrong. There are sleds, or boats, being used on the Antarctic ice right now, propelled by gasoline—an air propeller and a series of 'claws' that grip the ice underneath the body of the sledge."

"Air propeller?" cried Billy. "Why, there isn't resistance enough in the air to give her any speed."

"Not like a propeller in the water, of course. Yet, how do aeroplanes fly?"

"Gee! that's so."

"But, suppose we had a small engine on here and a sprocket wheel attachment—something right under the main beam to grip the ice and force her ahead?"

"Great, Dannie!" exclaimed the younger boy, instantly converted.

"Well—it might not work, after all," said Dan, slowly.

"Let's try it!"

"We'll see. Where we lose headway on this *Fly-up-the-Creek* is when we head her around, or the wind dies on us altogether. *Then* the auxiliary engine might help—eh?"

"Great!" announced Billy again. "We wouldn't get becalmed out here on the river then, that's sure."

42 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

The boat was creeping down the river right then, failing a strong current of air to fill the canvas. The string of islands that broke the current of the Colasha below Meadville was on their left hand. The last island—or, the first as they sailed up the river—was the largest of all, and was called Island Number One.

As the iceboat rumbled down stream Billy asked, suddenly:

“What do you think about that dummy, Dan? Suppose he’s over yonder?”

“On the island?”

“Yep.”

Dan viewed the high “hog-back” of the island curiously. It was well wooded, but the boys had often been ashore and had never seen a hut, nor other shelter, upon it. Dan shook his head.

“Where would the poor fellow stay? What did he do through that cold rainstorm—don’t see a sign of smoke. He *can’t* be there, Billy.”

“I know it doesn’t seem probable,” admitted the younger boy. “But remember that paper ‘Dolph found. Something’s buried there, and Dummy was left to guard it.”

“How romantic!” chuckled Dan.

“Well! isn’t that so?” demanded the younger lad.

“We don’t know what that line of writing really means,” said Dan.

"Huh! It's plain enough. Oh, Dan!"

The younger boy had turned again to look at the island as the iceboat slid out of its shadow.

"What's the matter now?" demanded Dan.

"Look there! Up—up yonder! Isn't that smoke?"

"Smoke from what?" demanded Dan, glancing over his shoulder quickly. He dared not neglect the course ahead for long, although the boat was not traveling fast.

"From fire, of course!" snapped Billy. "What does smoke usually come from?"

"Sometimes from a pipe," chuckled Dan. "I don't see anything——"

"Above the tops of those trees—right in the middle of the island."

"I—don't—see——"

"There! rising straight against the sky."

"Why—it's mist—frost—something," growled Dan. "It can't be smoke."

"I tell you it is!" cried Billy. "What else could it be? There's no mist in such frosty weather as *this*."

"But—smoke?"

"Why not?" cried Billy. "I bet that Dummy is over there."

"Then he must have his campfire in the tops of the trees," chuckled Dan. "Now where's your smoke, Billy?"

A puff of wind swooped down upon them. Dan had to attend to the management of the *Fly-up-the-Creek*. The puff of wind was followed by another. Soon the current of air became steady and the iceboat whisked down the river at a faster pace.

"Where's your smoke now?" Dan repeated.

"Wind's whipped it away, of course," grinned his brother. "Gee! can't this thing travel?"

The experience of skimming the crystal surface of the river was yet so new that Billy gave his whole mind to it, and forgot Dummy and the faint trace of smoke he had seen against the starlit sky, hovering over Island Number One.

This slant of wind that had suddenly swooped down the icy channel drove the craft on as though it really were a bird winging its way homeward. The steel rang again, and at every little ripple in the ice the outrigger leaped into the air.

As the speed increased, Billy crept out upon the crossbeam so as to ballast it. A little cloud of fine ice particles followed the boat and the wind whined in the taut rigging.

They had no means of telling how fast the boat flew, for it was impossible to properly time her by their watches and the landmarks along the river bank; but Dan and Billy were quite sure that they had never come down the stream any faster in their power boat than they did now.

There was a piece of "pebbly" ice inshore, not far below Island Number One, and Dan remembered its location. Therefore he changed the course of the iceboat and she shot over toward the far bank.

Billy shouted something to him, but he could not hear what it was. The younger boy pointed ahead, and Dan stooped to peer under the boom.

The moon had drawn a thin veil of cloud over her face and, for the moment, her light was almost withdrawn. A mist seemed rising from the ice itself; but Dan knew that was a mere illusion.

Suddenly the moon cast aside her veil and her full light scintillated across the river. Billy uttered a yell and waved a warning arm as he gazed ahead. Dan saw it, too.

It seemed as though a wide channel had suddenly opened right ahead of the rushing iceboat—they could see the moonlight glinting across the tiny waves of an open stretch of water.

CHAPTER VI

GETTING INTO TRIM

READY as the Speedwell boys were in most emergencies, here was an occasion in which it seemed that disaster could not be averted. That is the principal peril of iceboating; it is impossible to stop a craft, once she is under fast way, within a reasonable distance.

It was too late to drop the sail and hope to bring the *Fly-up-the-Creek* to a halt before her nose was in the open water. For the instant Dan Speedwell's heart seemed to stand still.

There flashed across his mind the remembrance of how that other iceboat—the *White Albatross*—had gone into the open river. Had he and Billy not been on the spot, as they were, Money Stevens and Barrington Spink would doubtless have been drowned.

And here was another such accident. The iceboat flew right down to the wide channel where the moonbeams glanced upon the ripples——

But she kept right on in her flight, and to Dan's amazement the runners rumbled over the apparently open water with an increasing roar!

"Crickey!" shrieked Billy, turning a grin upon his brother, "didn't you think that was open water, Dan? I thought we were done for—I really did! And it was only the moonlight glistening upon a rough piece of ice."

Dan's heart resumed its regular beat; but he knew that—had it been daylight instead of moonlight—his brother would have observed how pale he was. Seldom had his coolness been put to a keener test than at that moment.

"I tell you what it is," Dan said, discussing the incident with his brother afterward, "ice-boating is a job where a fellow has to have his head about him all the time. And we've got to be especially careful if we take the girls riding on this thing."

"If we do!" grunted Billy. "Why, if we don't, Mildred and Lettie will give us no peace—you know that, Dan."

"Just the same, we'll not take 'em with us when there's any sign of a gale on the river. It means too much. There are too many chances in iceboating."

During this week some of the other Riverdale boys had been busy. Monroe Stevens's *Redbird* arrived and made a pretty show on the river near town. Money maneuvered it about the cove and up and down the stretch of river near the Boat Club very nicely.

Barrington Spink had saved the mast and sail from the wreck of his old boat and local mechanics had built for him another *White Albatross*. As he had plenty of money he easily obtained what he wanted, including a mate to help handle the iceboat. But, as a whole, the boys and girls of Riverdale did not quite "cotton" to the new boy.

Came Saturday, however, and there were more than a few of the Outing Club down by the river to watch the maneuvers of the iceboats. Although the skating was excellent, it was neglected while the young folk watched Money Stevens get under way and shoot out of the cove in his *Redbird*.

The *White Albatross* was a larger boat than Money's and it was rigged up quite handsomely. There were cushions in the box-body, and neat hand-rails. Money had taken out his sister Ella and Maybell Turner; so now Barry wanted to inveigle some of the girls into *his* craft.

Mildred and Lettie were waiting for the appearance of the Speedwells, but not altogether sure that they would come. The girls hadn't had a chance to speak to Dan and Billy for several days.

"Do you suppose they have finished the boat they were building?" Lettie asked the doctor's daughter.

"When Dan promises a thing——"

"I know," Lettie broke in, hastily. "But he isn't infallible. And I *do* want to try iceboating. That Barry Spink hinted that he'd take me out if I wanted to go. Here he comes now."

Spink came forward, all smiles and costume—and the latter was really a wonderful get-up for Riverdale. Most of the boys of the Outing Club were content to wear caps lettered "R. O. C." and call it square. That is as near to a uniform as many of them got.

But Barry Spink was dressed for the occasion. His outfit was something between a Canadian tobogganing costume and a hockey suit. He wore white wool knickerbockers, gray stockings, high-laced boots, a crimson sweater and a white "night-cap" arrangement on his head—one of those floppy, pointed caps with a tassel.

Lettie couldn't help giggling when he approached; nevertheless she managed to greet him with some show of calm.

"This is my friend, Miss Kent, Mr. Spink," said Lettie. "How nice your boat looks, Mr. Spink!"

"Ya-as," drawled Barry. "I think she's the goods, all right. I'm just going to hoist the sail. Wouldn't you ladies like to take a little trip?"

"In the *White Albatross*? Oh! I don't know that we really *could*," said Lettie, her eyes dancing.

"You needn't be afraid," returned Barry, airily. "I have managed iceboats since I was a child—re'lly!"

"Let's go!" whispered Lettie to her friend.

"No," said Mildred, firmly. "I am obliged to you, Mr. Spink; but we have promised to go out with Dan and Billy Speedwell in their boat—if they come down the river. And I would not care to disappoint them."

"Oh, pshaw!" laughed Spink. "I heard they were trying to build an iceboat. But, of course, having no experience, they'll never be able to do it. Money bought his boat all ready to put together, and it is a fairly good one; but it takes experience to build—as well as to handle—an ice racer."

"What's that coming?" cried Lettie, suddenly.

They stood where they could get a view of several miles of the upper reaches of the Colasha. The *Redbird* was just swooping around to return to the Cove; but beyond Money's boat there had suddenly appeared another sail.

It was a huge sail and it flew over the ice at a terrific pace. Everybody about the Boat Club landing saw it, and the interest became general.

"There's another iceboat, Mr. Spink," exclaimed Lettie. "And see it fly! I guess there are others besides you and Money who know how to sail such craft."

"I declare!" said Spink, in surprise. "It's re'lly coming finely. Must be, Miss Parker, that you have some professionals here after all."

"It's Dan and Billy, of course," declared Mildred.

Spink laughed at that statement. "Hardly," he said. "I have seen the professional racers on the Hudson, and that is the way *they* manage their craft. See it! what a swoop. See that fellow standing up on that out-runner, and hanging on just by his teeth, as you might say! *That's* some sailing—believe me!"

"It is Billy Speedwell!" cried Lettie, suddenly becoming anxious. "He'll be killed! The reckless boy!"

"And it's Dan at the helm," added the doctor's daughter.

"Never!" exclaimed Barry. "It can't be those milkmen."

But nobody paid any attention to the new boy just then. The crowd all ran to watch the fast-flying ice yacht speed down the river. Monroe Stevens's *Redbird* was nowhere. The strange craft flew fully two lengths to its one, and was very quickly at the entrance to the Boat Club Cove.

They beheld Billy Speedwell hanging to the wire cable that helped steady the mast, and swinging far out from the out-runner, so as to help

keep that steel on the ice as the boat swung into the cove.

Dan let go the sheet at just the right moment, and the sail rattled down into the standing-room. Billy dived for it, and kept the canvas from slatting, or getting overboard under the runners. Thus, under the momentum she had gained, the craft ran in to the landing amid the cheers of the Speedwells' school fellows.

"Great work?"

"I've got something to tell you right now, Billy Speedwell!" shouted Jim Stetson, above the confusion.

"Shoot, Jim! let's have it," returned the younger Speedwell.

"You needn't think you're going to have it all your own way in this iceboat game—so now, Billy!"

"We don't want it all our own way," growled Billy. "But I reckon we'll show you fellows some class, just the same."

"Wait!" yelled Jim.

"What for?" demanded Billy.

"Wait till you see what Biff Hardy and I have got. We'll have the *Snow Wraith* on the ice next week and then we'll show you some sailing," declared Jim, confidently.

"Bully!" cried Billy. "The more the merrier. I can see right now that if we have an ice-

boat regatta here at Riverdale, it will be some occasion."

Indeed, the enthusiasm for the new sport increased hourly. The sight of the Speedwells' boat sweeping in to the landing had made the heart of every spectator beat quicker. And, of course, every fellow who was building an iceboat believed that *his* was the better craft!

The girls had run down to the ice to see the Speedwells' boat at closer range.

"What under the sun do you call it?" gasped Lettie Parker. "That's a name for you! '*Fly-up-the-Creek!*' Whoever heard of such a thing?"

"It's the blue heron; isn't it?" asked Mildred, laughing.

"That's what some folks say; but, anyhow," explained Dan, "the fly-up-the-creek flies so fast that few people have ever seen one in full flight."

"My goodness! aren't you smart?" quoth Lettie. "But why not select a pretty name for it?"

"Goodness! not if *you* are going to sail with us," cried Billy. "We couldn't afford such a superabundance of beauty. A pretty name for the boat as well as a couple of howling beauties like you and Mildred——"

But Billy had to dodge Lettie's vigorous palm then, and for the next few moments he kept well out of her reach.

He and Dan swung the craft around, raised the sail again, tucked the two girls in under the rugs with which they had furnished her, and then shoved the *Fly-up-the-Creek* out from the land.

"We're off!" yelled Billy, as he leaped aboard the outrigger. "Bid us a fond farewell, and you can reach us by wire at Lake Karnac."

Meanwhile Barry Spink and his helper had got the *White Albatross* under way. She was already running for the mouth of the cove.

"You won't be so lonely as you think, Billy," said Miss Parker, pointing a red mitten at Spink's craft. "Mr. Spink is going to show you boys how an iceboat ought to be handled."

"Crickey!" ejaculated Billy. "What a get-up!"

"Yes! isn't he gay?" asked Mildred, smiling.

"Just the same," Dan observed, quietly, "I reckon that fellow can handle his boat all right. He's been living where they know all about ice-boating."

"Huh!" exclaimed his brother. "The only time I ever saw him handle one he ran it into the water. We ought to be able to do as well."

"Oh!" cried Mildred. "Don't you dare! I wouldn't have come if I thought there was any danger of *that*."

CHAPTER VII

OUT ON THE ROAD

THE humming runners of the *Fly-up-the-Creek* quickly drowned their voices. The wind was light, and it was not fair for the boats running up stream; yet handled right, the ice craft made good speed in that direction.

Billy, by Dan's order, shook out the jib, and with all canvas drawing they made a long leg to the farther shore of the Colasha, so that when they tacked they were ahead of both the *Redbird* and Barry Spink's craft.

The three iceboats, however, were not far apart at any time as they tacked up the river. Money Stevens did not handle the *Redbird* as smoothly or as neatly as did Barry Spink and his mate; therefore the *White Albatross* was the nearer to the Speedwells' craft.

Once the Spink boat crossed the bows of the *Fly-up-the-Creek*, and the excited Lettie cried:

"Oh, dear! that boy is beating us. Can't you go faster, Dan? I thought you always were speedy?"

"No. Only Speedwell," returned Dan, gravely.

"I think we're going quite fast enough," remarked Mildred, who was clinging tightly to the hempen loop that Dan had put into her hand when they started.

"It does not follow that we're being left behind because the *Albatross* crossed in front of us," Dan reassured Lettie.

The girl raised up her head to look, and Billy yelled at her:

"Low bridge! Down, I say! Do you want your head knocked off?"

For at that moment Dan had brought the helm about. The boom swept across the body of the iceboat. Billy himself dropped to a horizontal posture.

With creaking and groaning the huge sail belied out at just the right angle and the slant of the wind flung the iceboat forward on the new tack. She fairly leaped from the ice under the momentum of that sudden gust, and both girls screamed.

Billy laughed happily, for nobody was hurt, and the *Fly-up-the-Creek* was almost at once on even keel again. But the two girls could only cling tight for the next few minutes and gasp their fear into each other's ears.

"Look behind!" commanded Dan, after a minute.

Mildred and Lettie did so. To their amazement both the *White Albatross* and the *Redbird* were far astern. At least a mile separated them from the Speedwells' craft.

"How—how did you do it, Dannie?" asked Mildred, wonderingly.

"Oh! whatever you did, don't do it again," gasped Lettie.

"We went fast enough to suit you that time; did we, Let?" chortled Billy.

"I merely took advantage of a flaw in the wind," declared Dan. "You see, the wind is not steady this afternoon, and really, bye and bye, I expect it will get around into a new quarter and stick there. I was looking for that puff, and Spink wasn't. He tacked too soon and thought he had beaten us. But now——"

"He won't catch us in a week of Sundays!" finished Billy, in delight.

The wind became so uncertain, however, within the next few minutes, that Dan decided it was inexpedient to continue farther than Island Number One. There were clouds in the northeast, too, and a storm might be on the way.

Therefore the boat was headed about and the canvas filled again as the steel runners squealed around the head of the island.

"Don't see our friend the dummy anywhere, Dan!" yelled Billy.

"Pshaw! there isn't anybody on this island," returned his brother.

This attracted the girls' attention and Lettie asked, curiously: "Who is 'the dummy,' Billy? Anybody I know?"

"Give it up! he may be one of your particular friends for all I know," returned the younger boy. "But he doesn't speak English—not so's you know what he says; and I never heard, Let, that you were very proficient in French or German. How about it?"

"What does he mean, Dan?" asked Lettie, turning her back upon the other boy. "Who is this dummy?"

Dan was pretty busy with the steering of the boat, but he managed to tell the girls—briefly—of his short association with the strange boy whom Billy had almost run over in the snowstorm.

"Isn't that strange!" exclaimed Mildred. "And do you suppose the poor dumb boy is still somewhere about here?"

"Billy says he's camping on the island yonder," chuckled Dan.

"Of course, that's just like Billy," scoffed Lettie Parker. "Chock full of romance."

"All right, all right," grumbled the younger boy. "You folks wait. Dummy'll turn up again when you least expect him."

And oddly enough Billy proved to be a prophet

in this event; but the others did not believe it at the time.

The uncertainty of the wind shortened the stay of the Speedwell iceboat on the river that day. The boys took the girls back to the landing and then were quite two hours in getting the *Fly-up the-Creek* to John Bromley's.

There was some snow that night; but not enough to clog the roads, and it all blew off the ice. The intense cold continued and most of the Riverdale Academy pupils spent their spare time on the ice the following week. But Dan and Billy Speedwell had work in another direction.

Their racing car was now four years old, for they had bought it second hand. For short distances there were probably a dozen cars right in Riverdale that could best the boys' racer.

But when it came to the longer runs, Dan and Billy were well aware that skillful handling counted really more than the machine itself. There were frequent amateur road races and the Speedwells never refused a challenge.

Now they intended to put their old car into tip-top order, and most of the boys' spare time that week was devoted to this object.

They got her out on the road Monday afternoon and despite the cold worked for three hours between their house and the Meadville turnpike. Dan drove her and the speedometer registered

what they would have considered very good time indeed for an ordinary run. But they didn't make racing time—— “Not by a jugful!” as Billy grumbled.

“There's something wrong,” admitted his brother, seriously.

“S'pose she needs a regular overhauling? Have we got to knock her down and overhaul her from the chassis up?”

“I don't know. It's not so long ago that we had her in on the machine shop floor, you know, Billy, and Mr. Hardy, Biff's father, went all over her himself. She's getting old, of course, and we've used her a lot.”

“I—should—say—yes,” drawled the younger boy. “Nobody's got more out of a motor car around Riverdale than we have out of this one.”

“But I believe she's good for many a race,” asserted Dan. “You see, it may be some little thing. There might be a leak——”

“Leak? pshaw! you know the gas runs as clean as a whistle. And what would *that* have to do with her losing time?” demanded Billy.

“Wait. I mean a leak in the ignition wiring.”

“Wow!”

“Never thought of that—eh?” demanded Dan.

“No. And I'm not thinking much of it now, Dannie—you old fuss.”

"Don't you be too fresh calling me names, sonny," advised the older youth. "You want to remember that the wiring of this car is old. A tiny break in the insulation would be enough to spell 'trouble.' Get me, Billy?"

"Uh-huh! But I don't see——"

"Let's try it. That's the only thing to do to make sure."

"How are you going to do it?" demanded Billy, anxiously.

"Watch me," returned his brother, with assurance, and he immediately went to work to test the insulation.

Billy was sure he was "some punkins" (as he often remarked) when it came to mechanics; but he knew Dan had him "beaten to a mile" when once the elder boy put his mind to a mechanical problem. So he watched Dan narrowly.

To find a leak in the ignition wiring of a machine is no joke; the break may be of the tiniest and in a remote location, too. But Dan had a practical idea about it and he started right.

First he disconnected the conductors, one at a time, replacing them with temporary connections made with an ample length of free wire, laid outside the motor parts.

It did not take long to do this, and this method of "bridging" the conductors without dismantling the connections brought about just what Dan

wished. There were two tiny leaks and in an hour Dan had corrected the faults and put everything in shape again.

"Now, we'll give her another spin," he grunted. "If I'm not mistaken, Billy, she will act like a different car."

"Come on. You've got to show me," returned the other. "Doesn't seem as though those two little cracks in the insulation could put her in so bad."

They got the car out on the hard road. There was still an hour before sunset and they could go far in an hour.

And how the old car spun along! Billy was delighted and Dan grinned happily. "You sure hit the trouble, old boy!" declared the younger brother. "You are one smart kid——"

Dan punched him good-naturedly in the ribs, and said:

"Be respectful—be respectful, sonny. Remember I'm older than you."

"That doesn't worry me much," returned Billy. And then suddenly he jumped up, demanding: "D'ye see that, Dan? Look!"

They had been going pretty fast, but Dan shut off the power at once. Far ahead of them on the road a red touring car was approaching—a brilliant patch of color against the background of saffron sky.

If the color scheme had caught *their* eye, so much more did it catch the eye of Farmer Bulger's black bull, that had just broken out of bounds and entered the highway from the barnyard lane.

Instantly the beast saw the red car coming and it bellowed a challenge, pawing the frozen ground and shaking his horns threateningly. His back was to the Speedwells' gray car, and he paid that no attention; the boys saw that the brilliantly painted touring car was filled with girls.

"It's Burton Poole's new car!" gasped Billy.

"And Mildred and Lettie are in it!" added Dan, quite as excited as his brother.

"Crickey! why doesn't that Poole know enough to back out. That bull is an ugly fellow."

"It isn't Burton at the wheel," growled Dan, suddenly. "It's Barry Spink—— By George!"

There were other girls in the car besides the doctor's daughter and Lettie. They were all screaming as the red car dashed toward the great beast that barred the way. At last Spink stopped; but then it was too late to turn the car and escape.

With a vicious bellow the bull charged and struck the radiator of the car a solid blow, breaking it. He bounded back from the collision and shook his head from side to side; but he showed every intention of making a second charge and this time he might clamber into the car itself!

CHAPTER VIII

THE PLANS

"LEMME get out and find a club, Dan!" begged Billy, as the gray car continued to approach the red one at a swift pace.

"What could you do with a club?" demanded the older lad.

"I'd bust it over that beast's head!" declared his brother, excitedly. "Stop the car!"

The occupants of the red car had all crouched down in the bottom, hoping the bull would not see them. They might have been ostriches hiding their heads from pursuit in the desert sand.

The beast charged again, and this time he smashed the windshield and got his forehoofs into the front of the car. Barry Spink vaulted over the back of the seat and left Lettie Parker (who had sat with him) to her fate.

"We're coming, Let!" roared Billy, standing up and fairly dancing in the onrushing gray racer.

The next instant the bull backed away and got right into the path of the Speedwells' car. Dan had intended to run her alongside of the red automobile and give the frightened passengers a chance to escape.

But the bull got in the way. There was a heavy thud, and Mr. Bull flopped over on his side, bellowing in pain and surprise, while the gray car rebounded from his carcass as though it were made of India rubber.

"Goody-good!" shrieked Lettie Parker. "Bump the mean old thing again, Dan! Bump it!"

But Dan shut off the power quickly. He was afraid the collision had done the racer no good, as it was.

However, he had no intention of seeing the bull do any further harm to the crowd in Burton Poole's car. With Billy, he ran at the beast, that had now staggered to his feet. Dan had seized a long-handled wrench from the tool box, and before the bull could lower his head to charge, he hit the tender nose a hard clip.

How the creature roared! He hated to give up the fight and it was not until Dan had struck another blow that the bull backed into the ditch and cleared the road for the passage of the two cars.

"For pity's sake get under the wheel yourself, Burton!" exclaimed Dan. "Get those girls out of here."

"I'm going to get into your car, Billy," declared Lettie Parker.

"And I, too!" gasped Mildred.

"Why, it wasn't my fault the old bull charged us," whined Barrington Spink.

"You give me a pain!" growled Burton, who was a big, rather slow-witted fellow, but sound of heart. "You jumped over the seat and left Let to be gored to death by that beast—as far as *you* cared!"

"I—I thought she was coming, too," gasped Spink.

"See if you can get any action in your engine," Burton," advised Dan. "If that other fellow had had any sense at all he wouldn't have rushed right down upon the bull in the way he did."

"I—I didn't suppose it would dare face the car," continued the explanatory Spink.

"Rats!" snapped Billy, in disgust. "The car's red enough to give anything the blind staggers! No wonder that old bull went for it."

Burton tried to turn his engine; but he couldn't get a bit of action out of it. Fortunately the bull was whipped, and the Speedwells turned their own machine about, hitched on to the red car, and towed it back to Riverdale, unmolested.

Later in the week, after the boys had tried the racer out to their complete satisfaction, Dan remained up one evening long after his brother had gone to bed. Billy fell asleep seeing Dan bent over certain drawings he had made, and it must have been midnight when the younger boy was

startled out of his sound sleep by a sudden sound.

There was Dan hopping about the room in a grotesque, stocking-footed dance.

"What under the sun's the matter with you, Dan?" gasped the younger boy.

"I've got it! I've got it!" ejaculated his brother, snapping his fingers and continuing the dance.

"Stop it! stop it, I say!" commanded Billy. "You'll have mother in here. My goodness! can't you break out with the measles—or whatever you've got—at a decent hour?"

"It's something bigger than the measles, Billy," chuckled Dan, falling into his chair before the table again. "Look here."

"Those old plans——" began Billy, sleepily.

"These *new* plans, you mean," responded his brother, vigorously. "I tell you I've struck pay dirt."

The words stung Billy into a keener appreciation of his brother's excitement. Awakened from a sound sleep, he had been rather dazed at first. Now he knew what Dan meant.

"You—got—it?" he gasped, stifling a mighty yawn. "Figured it all out?"

"I'm going to rig a motor-driven sprocket wheel arrangement that will push a car over the ice at good speed—yes, sir!"

"Going to hitch it to the *Fly-up-the-Creek*?"

demanded Billy, eagerly, bending over the papers Dan had prepared.

"No. That's where I was wrong. We'll build an entirely new iceboat. See here?" and he at once began explaining to his brother the idea that developed—as it seemed—almost of itself since Billy had gone to sleep three hours before.

"It sure looks good!" exclaimed the younger boy, admiringly, when Dan had concluded. "You *have* got it, Dan! And the boys will be crazy over it."

"We'll just keep it to ourselves, you know," warned Dan. "Mr. Robert Darrington is going to offer a handsome prize for the fastest iceboat at the regatta we're going to hold. Don't you know that?"

"Well—er—yes."

"Then we'll just keep still about this scheme. Some of the parts will have to be made in the machine shops, you know. And some parts we'll get old Troutman, at Compton, to make. You remember him?"

"Sure! the pattern maker who worked for Mr. Asa Craig when Mr. Craig was building his submarine."

"The same. We won't let anybody but father see the plans as completed. No use in letting 'em in on the scheme."

"Crickey, Dan!" exclaimed Billy. "If we

build a racer that wipes up the whole river, Barry Spink will turn green with envy. I heard him blowing the other day that he was going to have some kind of a mechanical contrivance built for his *White Albatross* that would make her the fastest thing on the ice."

"That's all right. Maybe he's got something good up his sleeve," laughed Dan. "But I believe that we have something just a little better here," and he tapped the plans on the table.

CHAPTER IX

THE BOY WHO COULDN'T TALK

THE Speedwells were busy boys these days. The excitable Billy had so many irons in the fire (so he said) that he could barely keep all of them hot.

Then, there was the secret building of the new iceboat. Dan and Billy had said little of their scheme outside the family; but it was known in Riverdale that the Speedwells proposed to rig a "new-fangled" racing machine that would "just burn up the ice" when the midwinter ice races were held.

"What's she going to be driven by, Billy?" asked Biff Hardy, meeting the Speedwells one afternoon at the edge of the Boat Club Cove. "Steam—gas—or nitroglycerin? Pa says you've brought him some patterns for things that he believes belong to a combination aeroplane and motor mowing machine. How about it?"

"Never you mind," returned Billy, grinning, for Biff Hardy, who worked in the Darringford Machine Shops, was one of the Speedwells'

staunchest friends. "I don't just understand all about the plans myself. But Dan knows."

"You bet he does!" rejoined the admiring Biff. "But I'm not going to ask Dan. If it's a secret I know very well I couldn't get at it even if I hypnotized him!"

The *Fly-up-the-Creek* was very popular, whether the boys built a speedier craft, or not. If Mildred and Lettie didn't care to accompany Dan and Billy whenever they had time to skim the ice in the big craft, there were plenty of their schoolmates ready to enjoy such trips as the Speedwells were willing to give them.

And almost always when Dan and Billy were on the ice, the *White Albatross* made its appearance. Barrington Spink was forever trying conclusions with the bigger iceboat, and was never willing to admit defeat by her.

It was always "by a fluke," or because something broke on his own craft, when Dan and Billy chanced to leave the *White Albatross* behind. There was something "bull-doggy" about Barrington Spink. He never knew when he was beaten.

There was by this time quite a fleet of iceboats on the river, besides those of the Speedwell boys, Monroe Stevens, and Spink. Fisher Greene and his cousin had produced the *Flying Squirrel*. Jim

Stetson and Alf Holloway had bought a boat, too, and named it the *Curlew*.

There were, besides, other iceboats appearing on the Colasha, built and owned by some of the adult members of the boat club. There were a good many men devoted to sports in Riverdale, and the condition of the ice this season spurred them into joining the game.

The Oldest Inhabitant could not remember when there had been a winter so steadily cold. And, fortunately for the ice sports, there was little snow during these early weeks of the season.

"There are going to be great old times on this river before the winter's over, Dan," declared Billy, confidently.

"Providing the frost continues—eh?"

"It's bound to! Look at the almanac."

"Humph!" returned Dan, "I've heard of such a thing as an almanac being mistaken."

"That's all right," said Billy, not at all shaken. "Everybody believes this will be a great old winter. Robert Darringford is going in for iceboating, too. He's having a boat built in the shops—and he says it's going to be a wonder."

"Let 'em all rave," grunted Dan. "You'll see, Billy. There won't one of 'em get the speed out of their craft that we will out of ours."

"Where's those plans, Dannie?" asked his brother.

"Right in my pocket," returned Dan, promptly. "I'm not running the risk of having them picked up somewhere and so find their way into the hands of somebody who might catch on to our idea."

This was on a Saturday when Mildred and Lettie had expressed a desire to take a long trip in the *Fly-up-the-Creek*.

"We've never gone as far as Karnac Lake yet," Lettie pouted. "Always something happens before we get there. If you don't take us this time, boys, we'll go over to the enemy in a body!"

"What enemy?" demanded Billy.

"Barrington Spink. He's always asking us to accompany him on the *White Albatross*."

"Why don't you go with him, then?" snapped Billy. "Nobody's holding you."

"Now, children!" admonished the doctor's daughter. "Don't quarrel."

Dan and Mildred only laughed over the bickerings of the other couple. Soon the Speedwells' boat was made ready and the girls got aboard, while Dan and Billy pushed her out from the landing.

There was no gale blowing, but a good, stiff breeze—and it was fair. The huge sail of the *Fly-up-the-Creek* filled almost immediately, and they moved steadily out of the cove.

Outside, the *White Albatross* was maneuvering,

Spink evidently waiting as usual to try a brush with the Speedwells' craft. Barry shot the white iceboat down toward them as they came out of the cove, and shouted:

"Better come aboard here, girls, if you want to reach the lake. I'm on my way!"

"Who's going to tow you?" demanded Billy.

"I don't need any towing," returned Spink, sharply. "There's one thing sure, I can beat that old milkwagon of yours. Better take up my offer, girls!" he added, grinning impudently.

He *did* shoot away in advance at a good pace, and Lettie cried, under her breath: "Oh! don't you dare to let him beat us, Dan Speedwell!"

"The race is not always to the swift," returned Dan, smiling.

"I really wouldn't pay any attention to that fellow," said Mildred. "He is not worth noticing. And I don't see any reason why he should be so mean to us."

"Looks to me as though he wanted to cut Dan and me out with you girls," chuckled Billy.

"Well!" said Lettie Parker, in earnest for once, "that might be, too. But the particular reason why he dislikes you boys is because you don't 'make much' of him as some of the others do. You know, Barry's mother is rich."

"Seems to me I've heard something about that before," said Dan, laughing.

"He got in bad with you boys at the start. Billy only charged him a nickel for saving his life— isn't that so, Billy?" asked Lettie, with a giggle.

"I didn't want to overcharge the poor chap," returned Billy, with an answering grin.

"Well, you can't expect him to feel very kindly towards you, then," said Lettie.

"He's going to build a wonderful boat to beat anything you boys can put on the river," sighed Mildred. "He's going to win all the ice races at the regatta Mr. Darrington is arranging. Oh! I heard him telling all about it the other evening at Mary Greene's.

"Don't let that worry you for a little minute," Billy broke in, with some excitement. "Dan's got the plans of a boat right in his pocket now that will knock the eye out of any craft that will be on the ice *this* winter."

"I admire your slang!" exclaimed Lettie, with scorn.

"I bet I caught it from you," returned Billy, ready to "scrap" on the instant.

"Be good! be good!" cried Mildred. "Oh, Dannie! you are overtaking that white boat."

"That's what we're here for," returned the older boy, who had been attending strictly to business since Spink had challenged them.

The *Fly-up-the-Creek* was making good its

name. They were rushing up the river at a terrific pace. The *White Albatross*, whenever she tacked, lost ground. And finally when they came to the lower end of Island Number One, she had to make a long leg towards the farther side of the river, and so get to the leeward of the island.

Billy was staring at the island all the time they were passing.

"What's the matter, Billy?" demanded Lettie Parker. "What do you expect to see over yonder?"

"Billy's looking for Robinson Crusoe," chuckled Dan. "He believes there's a fellow living over there."

"Oh! you told us before," cried Lettie. "And, do you know, I told father and he said Sheriff Kimball ought to know about that."

"About *what*?" queried Mildred.

"Not that poor dummy?" cried Billy. "There isn't an ounce of harm in that fellow, I am sure."

"No. About there being something buried on the island. I don't know just what father meant. But you know, he is very friendly with the sheriff."

"Say! we don't want to get that poor chap into trouble," Billy urged. "Just like a girl—telling everything she knows!"

Before Miss Parker could "flare up" at this

statement and speak her mind, Mildred gave a little shriek.

"What's the matter?" demanded Dan, flashing a look around, too.

"See him? There!"

"It's Dummy!" yelled Billy, who was out on the crossbeam at his usual station and could see behind the bellowing sail.

There, upon a high rock on the shore of the island stood the figure of the boy Billy and Dan had knocked over in the snowstorm, weeks before. They could not be mistaken.

He was gazing across the end of the island toward the open ice on the far side. Suddenly he turned about and waved both arms madly at the *Fly-up-the-Creek* and her crew. But although he opened his mouth and babbled something or other, neither the boys nor their guests could understand what he said.

"He wants something of us!" cried Lettie.

"He's warning us!" gasped Mildred.

Dan swerved the helm and in a moment the iceboat came up into the wind and lost headway. They drifted past the end of the island, which was heavily wooded. And at that moment the *White Albatross* swooped around the head of the island, aimed directly for the Speedwells' craft.

"Look out!" yelled Billy, leaping up and waving his hand.

The girls screamed, too. There was not enough headway on the *Fly-up-the-Creek* for Dan to swerve her out of the track of the other boat.

There was a crash. The bow of the *White Albatross* struck the other craft a glancing blow and the latter whirled in a complete circle. Fortunately Dan had let go the halyards and the sail came down with a rush. But it went over the side, tangled in the runners, and the iceboat stopped dead, while Barry Spink and his companion, both grinning over their shoulders at their rivals, shot on up the river.

"Guess you know who'll reach Karnac first this time!" called Spink, waving his hand.

CHAPTER X

COASTING

IT was a mean trick, and one that might have had serious consequences. It was certain that Spink had seen the drifting *Fly-up-the-Creek* and might have averted the collision.

"If that lad over there had been able to talk plain," declared Dan, helping the girls out from under the smother of canvas, "we could have gotten out of the way. He tried his best to tell us what was coming."

Mildred was crying a little, for she was frightened; but Lettie Parker, Billy declared, sputtered like a bottle of soda.

"What a mean, *mean* thing to do!" she stammered. "I—I could box that Spink boy's ears myself! Stop crying, Milly—we're not all dead yet."

Billy chuckled—he had to. "We're far from dead; but Dan looks kind of bright-eyed. I wonder what he'd do to Barrington Spink right now?"

"Come on, Mildred," said the older Speedwell, patting the shoulder of the doctor's daughter.

ter. "Don't you mind. We're none of us really hurt, and neither is the boat—much."

Billy was examining the broken cables. The canvas, too, was badly slit where it had got under the sharp runners.

"We don't get to Karnac Lake to-day, I reckon," he said. "Guess you'd better have taken up that fellow's offer, girls."

"I'll never speak to Barrington Spink again!" declared Lettie.

Mildred dried her eyes, and then began scrutinizing the shore of the island. "Where is that boy who tried to warn us?" she asked.

"Dummy? I declare! he's skipped out," Billy said. "Now, Dan! what do you think? Didn't I tell you he was living on this island?"

"And guarding a buried treasure—eh?" chuckled the older boy.

"I'm going to see him—and talk to him!" declared Billy, earnestly.

"Not that he'll be able to talk to us—eh?" queried his brother.

"Well, he can make himself understood somehow," said Lettie, taking up the idea. "Come on, Billy! let's find him."

Mildred looked at Dan as though she thought he might forbid the search; but he did nothing of the kind. "Let the young ones run their legs off, if they want," he said to Mildred, as Billy

and Lettie climbed the rocky shore of the island. "I bet they don't catch that dummy."

"Why?" she asked, in wonder.

"He's too blamed elusive," declared Dan, hard at work mending the cordage that had been ripped loose by the collision.

Dan flung aside his coat to be less hampered. Mildred held things for him, and helped as she could until, when Billy and Lettie came back—disappointed—the iceboat was in some sort of shape for the start back.

"Well! where is he?" demanded Dan, flinging his coat across the stern of the boat.

"Ask me!" growled Billy.

"What! not found?"

"There's something blamed funny about this island," declared his younger brother with emphasis.

"We didn't find a trace of him," announced Lettie.

"But the smell of smoke," corrected Billy.

"That's so," agreed the girl, rather mildly for her. "We *did* smell wood smoke. But we didn't find a mark—not a footprint——"

"I should say not," said Billy. "And the island all rocks and frozen ground—not a smitch of snow on it anywhere."

"Funny thing," grunted Dan. "I wouldn't mind seeing that dummy myself. Well! let's get

on. Can't take you any farther up-river to-day, girls."

"Of course not!" said Lettie, tossing her head. "It seems as though we are fated never to get any farther up-stream on this old boat than here-about."

They couldn't get back to town in the damaged iceboat. They managed to beat their way to John Bromley's wharf, and then Billy ran all the way home and brought back the motor car, in which to transport the girls to their homes.

"That mean Barrington Spink!" exclaimed Lettie. "He's just gone past in his boat. We saw him stop for some time up there by Island Number One."

And later the Speedwell boys had reason to remember this statement. When they went to bed that night Dan searched his coat pocket in vain for the plans and specifications of the new motor-iceboat.

"Lost them — by jolly!" gasped Billy. "Where?"

Dan couldn't be sure of that; but he had his suspicions. He remembered clearly removing his coat where they had had the accident at Island Number One. The envelope might have fallen from his coat pocket.

So anxious were the boys that they went up the river road the next day after Sunday school, and

walked across the ice to the island. There were no boats on the river, but they saw the marks of their own and the *White Albatross's* runners on the ice at the head of the island.

So, too, did they find the torn envelope in which the plans had been; but Dan's drawings and specifications were not in it.

Who had got the plans? Was it Spink, when he stopped on his way down the river in the *White Albatross*? Or was it the mysterious occupant of the island whom the boys had dubbed "Dummy"?

The question not alone puzzled Dan and Billy; they were both troubled vastly by the loss of the drawings. A good mechanic could easily get the principle of Dan's invention and—perhaps—build a boat similar to the one the Speedwells were constructing.

Under Billy's earnest urging Dan agreed that they should search the island for some trace of the boy who could not talk; but they made absolutely nothing out of it. Not even a smell of smoke this time.

"That chap has the magic, all right, all right!" grumbled Billy. "He disappears as though he had an invisible cap."

"More probably he's here only once in a while," said Dan.

"How about yesterday?" demanded the

younger boy. "He wasn't on the ice when Lettie and I hunted for him—that's sure. He's got a hide-out here, and don't you forget it."

"Maybe he buries himself—along with the treasure—when he is pursued by curious folk," chuckled Dan.

But it was really no laughing matter. Dan was as glum as Billy when they returned home that Sunday evening. The plans were gone—and with them, perhaps, the chance the Speedwells had of building a faster boat than anybody who would enter for the iceboat races.

Not that Dan was unable to redraw the plans. That was easy. But the brothers feared that whoever found the original plans would make use of Dan's invention in the line of motor-propulsion for ice craft.

This was really a very novel arrangement, and might be worth some money if once the boys made a practical test of the idea on the river, and demonstrated its worth. Mr. Robert Darrington, the young proprietor of the machine shops, was always on the lookout for worthy inventions; he was the Speedwell boys' very good friend. Dan had rather hoped to interest Mr. Darrington in the invention.

Of course, he did not want to show the plans to the machine shop proprietor until after the races on the ice, for Mr. Darrington was going

to enter an iceboat of special design himself. But Robert Darringford was a trustworthy man, and the boys were greatly tempted to tell him about the loss of the plans.

However much disturbed they were by this loss, there were other matters which kept the boys busy and their minds alert during the next few days. The Speedwells were more than ordinarily good scholars, and stood well in their classes. Even "Doc Bugs," as one of their chief instructors was called by the more irreverent youth of Riverdale, seldom had to set down black marks against Dan or Billy.

Billy's superabundance of energy and love of fun was well exercised out of school hours; he stuck pretty well to his books in the classroom.

There was another snowfall which rather spoiled the skating for a few days; but did not halt the trials of the several iceboats on the river. The snow brought to the fore another sport that had always been popular in Riverdale—and is worthy of being popular in every section of our country where winter holds sway for any length of time.

"Coasting to-night on Shooter's Hill!" yelled Money Stevens, seeing the Speedwell boys making for their electric truck, which they had left behind Appleyard's store, as usual. "Bring down the 'bob,' boys. We'll have a jim-hickey of a time."

"Whatever *that* may be—eh?" chuckled Dan.

"Girls allowed?" asked Billy.

"Sure!" said Money. "Wouldn't be any fun bobsledding if it wasn't for the girls. They usually supply three things: The lunch, unnecessary conversation, and plenty of squeals," and he went his way to stir up other of the young folk of Riverdale.

That he—and others—were successful in gathering a throng at the top of Shooter's Hill by eight o'clock that evening, was a self-evident fact. Dan and Billy hitched old Bob and Betty to the pung and drove into town for Mildred and Lettie.

But for once the Speedwell boys were disappointed in their plans. They had not thought to call up either the doctor's daughter, or the town clerk's lively daughter. Dan and Billy took too much for granted.

When they reached the doctor's house, they were told Mildred had gone to spend the evening with Lettie; and when they pulled up with a flourish at the latter's domicile their hail brought nobody but a maid to the door.

"The girls ban gone off to Chooter's for sledging," explained the Swedish serving maid, grinning broadly at the disappointed boys.

"Goodness, Dan!" exclaimed Billy. "We're stung. What do you know about this?"

Dan was a bit grumpy himself. Yet he couldn't

blame Mildred. She, of course, had no idea the Speedwells, who lived so far out of town, knew anything about the plans for the evening.

"Hey, Selma!" yelled Billy, before the door closed. "Who'd they go with?"

"Das gone mit Mr. Greene and Mr. Spink," replied the girl.

"Stung twice!" grunted Billy. "That blamed Barrington Spink is getting under my skin, Dan. He's forever putting his oar in where it isn't wanted. Just as sure as you live, boy, he and I are going to lock horns yet."

"You keep out of scraps, Billy," advised his brother, as he turned the horses.

"Take care of the bob!" cried Billy, suddenly.

Their bobsled was tailing on behind the pung and Billy didn't want to see it smashed. "Shall we keep on to the hill?" asked Dan.

"Bet you! We'll show Let Parker that she's made a mistake by going with the Spink kid. No matter what he's got to slide on—even if it goes by steam—I bet we can beat him."

"That's putting it pretty strong, Billy," laughed Dan. "Do you think you can fulfill the contract?"

CHAPTER XI

A HAIR'S BREADTH FROM DEATH

THE horses faced the wind as they struck into the Long Bridge road, and shook their heads impatiently till the bells on the harness rang again. Billy crouched a little behind Dan's bulkier shoulder, for Dan was driving.

"Whew! some breeze this," said the younger boy, who could not keep silent for long.

"At our backs, if we coast down Shooter's," said Dan.

"That's so. But we'll have to face it going up—and dragging the girls, too."

"Good thing we haven't any girls to-night, then, Billy," said his brother.

"Huh!" grunted Billy, who was not yet in a forgiving spirit. "I hope that Barry Spink makes Lettie walk up hill every time. He looks like that sort of a fellow to me."

"If they have iced the course," Dan was saying, reflectively, "and with the wind blowing right down the hill, there will be some great sledding this night. Why! if we lay down a couple of lengths of the roadside fence at the bottom of

the hill, we ought to be able to cross the flat and slide right out on the river!"

"Some slide!" exclaimed Billy, with enthusiasm.

"The river's two and a half miles broad there," said Dan, still speaking thoughtfully.

"And Shooter's Hill is another two miles from foot to summit—that's sure," added Billy. "Some slide!" he added, repeating his exclamatory comment with gusto. "But do you think there'd be momentum enough to carry a sled across the river to this side?"

"No; I don't," admitted Dan. "But——"

"But what, old boy? What's working on you?" demanded Billy, eagerly, beginning to see that Dan's remarks pointed to some tangible idea.

"Let's drive around by the house first," said Dan, quickly, turning Bob and Betty into a side road.

The horses accelerated their pace at once, for they thought their stalls were just ahead of them.

Dan tossed the reins to Billy when they drove into the yard, and bolted into the house at once without saying another word. He was gone some few minutes, and Billy saw a lamp shining through a garret window before his brother appeared again.

When Dan did come out he bore an object that filled Billy first with amazement and then with delight.

"For goodness' sake! what's that for?" the younger boy demanded. "That old kite? Sure! you can put it up all right in a wind like this. But who wants to fly a kite on a moonlight night, when there's bobsledding in prospect——"

"Great Peter, Dan! I get you! I see! Say, boy! you've got the greatest head ever," declared the slangy and enthusiastic Billy. "Lay it down in back there so the wind won't get it. And plenty of cord?"

"Here's line that would hold a whale," chuckled Dan, climbing back to the seat. "What do you think? Will we show those fellows something?"

"We'll show Let Parker that she made a mistake," growled Billy, going suddenly back to his bone of contention with the town clerk's lively daughter.

The horses were off again in a moment, and it was not long before they came in sight of the Long Bridge and the glistening, snow-covered slope rising from the far bank of the river, and just beyond the bridge.

Dan and Billy could see their school friends and companions scattered over the coasting course on their bobsleds. There were smaller sleds, too;

but several big "double-runners" carried parties of shouting young folk down the two-mile slope and almost to the entrance to the bridge.

They did not mind the sharp wind—excepting while dragging the sleds to the top of the hill. But even that task was accomplished amid laughter and merriment.

The Speedwell boys drove across the bridge and put their horses under the shed of a farmer who lived on the bank of the river. They lifted out the huge kite carefully and with it, and their bob, hurried to join the crowd just then starting up the hill for another trip.

"What under the sun you got there, Dan?" demanded Money Stevens. He couldn't approach to examine the kite, for he was dragging one of the sleds himself and there were already three girls upon it.

"Oh! we're going to show you fellows a new trick," said Billy, proudly. "You wait and see."

Billy was looking for Lettie Parker, and he saw her now on a brand-new bobsled which was being drawn by Barry Spink and the biggest Greene boy. Mildred was with her.

"Hullo, Billy Speedwell!" shouted Miss Parker. "I didn't know you boys were coming over here."

"Well, I hope you see us, Let," said Billy,

with an air of carelessness. "We're right here—and we'll come pretty near leaving that bob you're on 'way behind."

"Just about the way your old *Fly-up-the-Creek* leaves my iceboat behind," scoffed Barry Spink. "I believe you milkmen are a couple of blow-hards!"

But Billy only laughed and he and Dan hastened their steps along the snowy road. Where the hill dipped to the level of the flats the Speedwells stopped and threw down two lengths of the fence. This opened a course to, and down, the easily sloping bank of the river.

"Aw, say!" cried Biff Hardy, who was with another bob; "that won't make you anything. We can't get momentum enough to clear that little rise between here and the river."

"Hold your horses, Biff!" advised Dan. "Let's see what we can do."

"And with a kite!" scoffed one of the other fellows. "What do you think you're going to do?"

But Dan would not be led into any discussion, while Billy was not just sure what his brother was intending. Once on the top of the hill Dan showed Billy what to do, in a hurry. They waited for the other sleds to go, so as to have a clear field. Then Billy raised the kite, Dan holding the stout line attached to it.

The stiff wind blowing from behind them, seized the big kite almost at once. She rose with a bound, Dan letting the line whistle through his gloved hands. She made one swoop when a flaw struck her, and then mounted again and the wind caught her full and square.

There she soared, steady and true, and the Speedwells hastily boarded their heavy sled. Dan fastened the line to a ring in front of the tiller with which he steered the sled. Billy, hanging on behind, started the sled over the brow of the hill by striking his heel sharply into the hard-packed snow.

The runners squeaked a little, and then the sled plunged downward. Had the wind been lighter, the momentum the sled gathered on the first half-mile of the hill would have forced the coasting Speedwells ahead of the kite.

But the gale was strong and steady. Away the great kite flew, with the line taut most of the way to the bottom of the hill.

"She ain't helping us a bit," objected Billy, shouting into Dan's ear. "Those other sleds went just as fast."

"Wait," commanded Dan, untroubled as yet.

The sled whizzed down to the bottom of the hill and then Dan steered out of the beaten track. The crowd watched the Speedwells in wonder. The sled went slower and slower, passing through

the break in the roadside fence and over the drifts toward the river.

But the great kite was tugging now. It drew the sled on, over the short rise, and then they pitched down the bank and out upon the river! They gained speed again and quickly left the cheering crowd behind, never stopping until they reached the other bank of the river.

"What do you know about this?" yelled the delighted Billy. "We got 'em going this time, I guess."

The kite fluttered over the trees on the bank and the boys were able to bring it to earth quickly, and without damaging the kite. It was covered with strong, oiled paper, and was not easily torn.

But it *was* a job to drag the sled all the way back again, and the kite, too. The other young folk had made a couple of trips on the shorter route before the Speedwells returned to the top of Shooter's Hill.

Nevertheless, Lettie Parker and Mildred Kent were waiting for them. Lettie had insisted upon leaving Messrs. Spink and Greene in the lurch. She was determined to "go sailing" with the Speedwell boys.

"Do you think it is dangerous, Dan?" asked Mildred.

"Of course it isn't," declared Lettie, before

Dan could answer. "I'm not afraid to do anything that Billy Speedwell does."

"If you really want to try it, Milly," Dan said, "we'll take you girls for one trip."

"You'll break all your necks fooling with that kite," growled Barry Spink.

He and his partner took some other girls on their bob and started at once for the bottom of the hill. They switched out of the beaten track and went through the break in the fence; but the momentum gathered by the bob would not take it over the little hill.

The Speedwells did not notice that Barry left the rest of the party there and went over the hill himself. He was back in a moment, and just then Billy got the kite into the air, and it began to tug at the Speedwells' bobsled.

"All aboard!" yelled Billy, and ran to take his place behind the girls.

Down the track they rushed and out across the flat. The kite tugged bravely and carried them over the rise. And just as they went over this little hill Dan uttered a cry of alarm. Right across their track, on the steep bank of the river, lay a great tree-branch that had not been there when the boys made their first trip behind the kite!

CHAPTER XII

THE "FOLLOW ME"

THE danger of a smash and overturn was imminent. The heavy bobsled was plunging toward the obstruction, and there was neither time nor space to steer clear of the branch.

The girls, breathless from the swift ride, could scarcely scream; and Billy was himself speechless. But Dan did not lose his head.

In a trice he whipped out his claspknife, sprung open the blade, and just before the collision occurred he cut the kite-string.

The huge kite turned a somersault in the air, and then plunged to the ice. But the boys and girls on the bobsled did not notice that.

The sled smashed into the tree-branch—and stuck. Dan went over on his head, but arose unhurt. The others had managed to cling to the sled.

"I know who did this!" yelled Billy, when he got his breath. "It was that Spink fellow."

"Oh! he wouldn't do such a thing," said Mildred, timidly. "It—it must have fallen here."

"Not much," declared Billy.

When they dragged the bobsled back to the rest of the crowd, Spink had already gone home. As Dan said, smiling, there was no chance for a row then; and before Billy met Barry Spink again, he had got quieted down and, on Dan's advice, did not accuse the fellow of the mean trick.

The kite was smashed all to pieces. Dan decided that that method of coasting was perilous, after all.

Besides, there was other work and other plans to take up the Speedwell boys' attention; already Dan and Billy were giving their minds to the new iceboat, which they believed would prove a very swift craft indeed.

The regatta committee, headed by Mr. Daringford and made up of influential sportsmen of Riverdale and vicinity, had set the date for the iceboat races in that week between Christmas and New Year's, when business is slack. It was holiday week at the academy, too, and the Daringford Machine Shop hands had a few days off.

Seldom had any public sports "taken hold" on the people of Riverdale like this iceboat sailing.

"It's the greatest stunt ever," Biff Hardy declared, "and if the cold weather keeps up all the grandfathers and grandmothers in town—as well as the rest of us—will be out cavorting on the ice."

There were some spills and a few minor accidents. But with the ice in the condition it was, there was little peril of accidents on the Colasha save through absolute carelessness.

Dan and Billy were busy these days racing in the *Fly-up-the-Creek*. Nobody but the family knew it; but most of the parts of the wonderful new boat Dan had invented, were finished. The engine had been set up and tried on the barn floor. Then the boys went over to Compton and got the parts Mr. Troutman had made for them, and with the parts Mr. Speedwell had helped them build, and certain others from the Darringford shops, the brothers secretly removed them all to John Bromley's dock, and assembled them in an old fish-cleaning shed.

The boys were very secret about it. Ever since the first plans Dan had drawn disappeared so mysteriously at Island Number One, the brothers had been worried for fear somebody had found and would make use of them.

The principle upon which the motor-auxiliary worked was novel and Dan was confident that by the aid of the rapidly-driven wheel that would grip the ice under the boat amidships, and her spread of canvas, the new craft would beat anything in the line of an iceboat ever seen on the Colasha.

Mr. Darringford joked with the boys a good

deal about the invention. He had examined the parts they had had built at the shops with much curiosity, and threatened to steal their ideas. But Dan and Billy knew they could trust him to the limit. It had been through Mr. Darringford that the Speedwell boys had obtained their real start in the racing game with their *Flying Feathers*—the motorcycles which were the particular output of the machine shops.

Nobody, Dan was sure, would guess the combination he had invented without seeing all the parts assembled. Only their father was in their confidence in the building of the boat.

Therefore, if any craft appeared like theirs at the regatta they could be sure that the lost plans had been made use of.

"And if anybody's guilty," declared Billy Speedwell, "it's Barry Spink. He is crowing to the other fellows that he's got us beaten already, and he won't let anybody look into that shed behind his mother's barn where the boat is being built."

"If he's doing it all himself, I'm not afraid," chuckled Dan. "Not if he had our plans fifty times over."

"But he isn't. There is a foreigner working there—I've seen him. He is a mechanic Mrs. Spink hired in the city, Wiley Moyle says, and they're paying him eight dollars a day."

100 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

"Ow! that hurts!"

"I believe it's true, just the same," said Billy. "Spink has got his heart set on beating us."

"If that's the price he's paying for it, he really ought to win," returned the older lad. "Eight dollars a day—gee!"

The Speedwell family—down to little Adolph—were vastly interested in the new boat. Finally, when it came time to put it together, the question of naming the craft came to the fore.

Naming the *Fly-up-the-Creek* had been something of an inspiration; but now they all wanted a hand in the christening of Dan's new invention. The matter was so hotly discussed that Mrs. Speedwell suggested finally drawing lots for the name.

One evening as they sat around the reading lamp each member of the family wrote his or her choice on a slip of paper ('Dolph printed his in big, up-and-down letters) and then the papers were shaken up in a bowl.

'Dolph was blindfolded and with great gravity drew a slip. It was Carrie's choice, and the paper read "*Follow Me*"—and thus the motor-iceboat was christened.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STRANGER

IT was both a cold and windy day on which Dan and Billy finally got the motor-iceboat down upon the ice. It was in Christmas week.

"I reckon that old blizzard you were telling about is pretty near due, Dannie," quoth the younger boy, blowing his fingers to get some semblance of warmth into them, for the boys and old Bromley had to work without gloves part of the time.

"There's a storm brewin'," declared the old boatman, cocking his eye toward the streaky looking clouds that had been gathering ever since day-break. "You can lay to that! And it wouldn't surprise me if it brought a big snow, boys. Ye know we ain't re'lly had our share of snow this winter so fur. We've had ice enough, the goodness knows!"

"You bet," agreed Billy, with a chuckle. "And ice gathers some fast, too—if you take it from Money Stevens."

"What's happened him now?" asked Dan.

"Why, Money went fishing up Karnac Lake way last Saturday—didn't you hear? Says he would have had great luck, if only he could have kept the hole open through which he was fishing. He swears he hooked a pickerel so big that he couldn't get it through the hole he'd cut in the ice!"

"That sure must have been some pickerel," chuckled Dan. "Now, John, what do you think of this craft?"

"By gravy! I don't know what to think of it, boy," grunted the old boatman. "It ain't like nothin' in the heavens, or on the airth, nor ag'in in the waters under the airth! If you say that dinky little ingine is goin' to make her go, why I reckon go she will! But seein's believin'."

"Right-O!" agreed Dan, smiling. "And we will proceed to put the matter to the test right now before we step the mast. Get aboard."

But Old John wouldn't do that. He preferred to watch the proceedings from the dock—and he said so.

"I ain't got so many more years ter live no way ye kin fix it," he said, grinning. "Lemme live 'em whole. I wouldn't venter on one o' them sailin' iceboats, let erlone this contraption."

Dan and Billy pushed out from the shore and started the engine. Dan could easily manipulate

the power as well as steer the *Follow Me*. Billy was passenger only on this trial trip.

There was a stiff breeze blowing and they headed directly into it. The moment the wheel under the boat gripped the ice she began to drive ahead. As Dan gradually increased its revolutions they moved faster and faster, while the whine of the engine and the sharp strokes of the wheel-points joined in an ever-increasing roar.

Behind them the ice showed a plain trail of punctures from the wheel-points. The *Follow Me* left a trail that might easily be followed anywhere on the ice.

But its speed was not great at first. Dan increased it slowly and, when she rounded to and headed back toward the landing, Billy was flatly disappointed.

"Crickey! this isn't going to do much, Dan. Why, the old boat can beat her."

"What did you expect?" asked his brother, smiling.

"But, old man! we're going to race with this thing!"

"Of course."

"And the *Fly-up-the-Creek* can beat her out—easy."

"Sure of that; are you?"

"What you got up your sleeve, Dannie?" the

other demanded. "Did you get all the speed out of her you could?"

"You saw that she was wide open," chuckled Dan. "But you forget that we had no sail set. Let's get the mast up and the sail bent on. *Then* we'll give her a fair trial."

Billy shook his head, however. He had believed that his brother's invention was going to prove as fast as a power-launch, without any canvas.

The mast and sail were both ready. They had the new boat rigged in an hour. There was still a full hour before sunset and again Dan took his place in the stern while Billy raised the sail.

The canvas of the *Follow Me* was not as heavy as that of the Speedwells' first iceboat. They had made some short runs in the *Fly-up-the-Creek* that had equalled fifty miles an hour—and more. Billy's heart had fallen pretty nearly to his boots. He did not believe the *Follow Me* could do anything like that.

But Dan only grinned at him. The wind filled the sail almost immediately and the motor-iceboat staggered away from Bromley's dock. The old boatman stood there and watched them with a grim face, for the new craft started very slowly. She seemed really to hobble at first.

"Them boys air going to be disappointed—by

jings!" muttered Bromley. "And that's too bad. But these yere new-fangled notions——"

"By gravey! what's happened?"

Suddenly the "put, put, put!" of the engine reached his ears. And at the same time the sail filled and bellied full. The motor-iceboat leaped ahead, the exhaust became a rumble, and the *Follow Me* shot up the river faster—it seemed to Bromley—than he had ever seen any craft move before.

She crossed the frozen stream diagonally and in two minutes was out of sight behind the hump-back of Island Number One! Her disappearance left the old man breathless.

"Some boat—that," said a voice behind him.

"Heh?" exclaimed John Bromley, turning to see a strange man standing coolly on his private wharf.

"That's a fine sailer," said the stranger.

"Mebbe 'tis," returned John, eyeing the man fixedly.

The latter was a keen-looking chap, lean and wiry, and dressed in a long, loose, gray ulster, buckled about his waist with a belt. He returned the old boatman's look, after a moment, with interest.

"You know those chaps who are running that boat?" asked the stranger.

"I reckon I know the Speedwells pretty well," grunted John.

"Speedwell—eh? Is that their name?"

"Yes, it is."

"What business have they got over on that island?"

"What business have you got asking me?" returned the old man, freezingly.

"I want to know."

"Keep wanting. Everything comes ter them that waits, they tell me."

"You are of a sour temper, I see," observed the stranger, eyeing Bromley quite calmly.

"Mebbe. But my temper is none of your business. Something else is."

"What's that, old timer?" asked the thin man, grinning slightly.

"You're on a piece of the earth I own. Get off it," said John Bromley, advancing truculently. "This dock is mine—and I own to the road. You git back to the road and stay there."

The man eyed him for a few seconds, as though to see whether he really meant the command, or not. It was quite plain that Bromley meant it. He was beginning to roll up his sleeves, and old as he was he looked to be a bad man to tackle.

"Oh! very well," said the stranger, backing off. "No offense meant."

"And that's lucky, too," growled John. "For

if you was meanin' offense I might come out into the road to you, at that! "

The stranger said no more, but gradually "oozed off the scenery," as Bromley told the boys afterward. "But that feller's got some reason for nosin' around here," the old boatman added, as he helped fasten the motor iceboat to the spiles of the dock. "I didn't like his looks—not a little bit."

"Do you suppose it is somebody trying to see what kind of an invention you have here, Dan-nie?" asked the awed Billy.

For the second trip of the motor iceboat had convinced the younger Speedwell lad that his brother was a marvel. He wasn't talking much about that trip, but if John Bromley had considered the speed of the *Follow Me* quite surprising, how much more impressed was Billy—and even Dan himself.

It was true they had had a favoring breeze—and a stiff breeze, too. The wind would have driven the boat at high speed, alone. But with the auxiliary motor at work the *Follow Me* had traveled at a breath-taking pace. She had gone the length of Island Number One, and the island beyond it, rounded the farther end of that second island, and come rushing back down the river to John Bromley's dock in an almost unbelievably short time.

"It doesn't matter who the fellow was," said Dan, finally; "you know we don't want anybody examining this boat. John understands that; don't you, John?"

"I'll keep me eye on her," growled the boatman. "They've got to be wide awake to beat old John. You leave it to me."

But both boys felt some worriment of mind as they scurried around that evening in the motor truck, picking up the cans of milk from the dairies.

If it had begun to snow they might have felt better about it. With a storm under way it would not be likely that anybody would seek out the *Follow Me* at John Bromley's lonely dock, for any purpose.

The Speedwell boys got back to the house, however, finished the chores for that night, and went in to supper before a single flake of the promised storm had fallen.

CHAPTER XIV

GATHERING TROUBLE

THE telephone tinkled in the kitchen just after Dan had pulled off his boots. He and Billy were the last to go to bed on this evening, for it was so cold that they had gone out to the milk room to blanket all the bottled milk for fear the bottles would freeze and burst their caps.

Billy, still having his boots on, went down the back stairway and Dan heard him speaking into the instrument. It was several moments before the older boy realized that Billy was growing excited.

And no wonder! Billy was listening to something over the 'phone that quite amazed him. In the first place he was surprised to hear old John Bromley's voice.

Bromley seldom if ever called them up, although the boys had paid for having him put on the party wire. It was handy for them to be in communication with Old John, summer and winter.

"You and Dan had better come down here," said the boatman, his voice very low. "There's something——"

It died out there and Billy asked him to repeat it. Old John seemed to keep right on whispering:

"I've chased 'em off, but they come back."

"*Who* has come back? What d'y'e mean?" gasped Billy.

"And so you better come. Don't want 'em . . . hear me talkin'——"

"What under the sun are you getting at, John?" exclaimed Billy. "Let's have the details."

Bromley's voice on the wire was strong for a moment. "Now, you wait——"

And that was all—every last word Billy heard! He rattled the hook, and shouted into the mouth-piece, and tried to call Central. He got her after a while and demanded that Bromley be called again.

"Doesn't answer!" snapped the girl, after a fruitless minute.

Dan, hearing Billy's voice rising to crescendo, pulled on his boots again and ran down to the kitchen. "You'll wake the whole house up," he exclaimed, admonishingly.

"Well, what do you know about this?" Billy demanded.

"About what?"

"Something has happened down to Old John's——"

He turned and made frantic efforts to get Central again. She said finally: "Don't answer. I think he's got the receiver off the hook."

Billy, at this, repeated as near as he could remember the broken sentences he had heard over the wire.

"Sure it was Bromley?" asked Dan.

"I hope I know his voice, even when he whispers," replied Billy, with scorn.

"We'd better go down there," said Dan, slowly. "John is old; something *might* have happened."

"I reckon something has happened, all right, all right!" growled Billy, beginning to struggle into his coat.

"Wait till I speak to father. We mustn't go without telling him. Get out the motorcycles, Billy."

"Betcher!" responded his brother, unlocking the kitchen door.

Five minutes later they were astride their machines and were wheeling for the crossroad that led down to Bromley's dock. The wind cut like a knife and it was pitch dark. Without their headlights they would not have dared venture along the black road. Now and then—it seemed to Dan—a flake of snow stung his cheek. The long-gathering storm was about due.

They shut off the noisy engines as they slid

down the hill to the river's brink. The *Flying Feathers* rattled a little over the ruts; but they approached the dock rather quietly, after all.

There wasn't a light anywhere about the premises—not even in Old John's little green painted shack where he had lived alone so many years.

"Let's go easy, Billy," advised Dan.

They hopped off their wheels and stood them carefully under the trees by the roadside. They quenched the light of their lamps, too; but Dan removed his lamp and carried it in his hand against emergencies.

"Don't see a soul around," breathed Billy. "Shall we hail the old man?"

"Not yet," returned Dan, quite as disturbed now as was his brother.

They were almost at the door of the cabin when Billy suddenly clutched Dan's arm. He pointed toward the outer end of the dock.

"Where—where's that other mast?" he demanded.

"What—you can't see it in this black night, Billy," Dan declared.

He, too, recognized the lofty mast of the *Fly-up-the-Creek*. The mast of the motor iceboat should have stood beyond it; but——

"It's gone!" gasped Billy, and started on the run down the dock.

"Wait!" called Dan, softly.

He raised his hand to knock upon the door of Bromley's hut, but halted in a panic. Out on the ice—seemingly from a great distance—sounded the explosions of a motor exhaust!

"They've robbed us!" shrieked Billy, from the end of the dock. "Look, the *Follow Me* is gone!"

Dan did not wait to rap on Old John's door. He lifted the latch and found it unbolted. As he stumbled into the place he fell over a body lying on the floor. Opening his lamp, he turned the ray upon the obstruction. It was Bromley, bound hand and foot, and gagged, lying helpless on the floor, but very much awake!

The old man's eyes glared like a mad cat's in the dark; and when Dan jerked away the bandage that had smothered his speech, the old boatman "let go" some deep-sea language that—at another time—would have quite startled the Speedwells.

"Those sculpins jumped on me—three of 'em. I knowed they was sneakin' erbout, an' I was tryin' ter warn ye over the 'phone. But while I was talkin' ter Master Billy they rushed me—broke right inter the house here an' grabbed me.

"Ye kin see I did some fightin'," said Bromley, who was now sitting down and holding his head, on one side of which a big lump had come into sudden being. "There's my butter crock

smashed—I heaved it at one of the villings—I did so!

“But three ter one is big odds for an old feller like me. Ye see what they done to me? And they went off with your new boat, Master Dan. *That’s* what they was after.”

“What did they look like?” queried Dan, sharply.

“They was masked—every one o’ them,” replied Bromley.

“They went up the river, Dan,” said Billy, eagerly. “Didn’t you hear the exhaust of their engine?”

“I couldn’t place it.”

“*I* could,” declared Billy, earnestly. “I was out on the end of the dock, and I marked it well. ’Twas up-stream——”

“Ye’d better telephone to the constable,” said Old John.

“To Josiah Some?” laughed Billy. “A fat lot of good *that* would do us.”

“You ’phone to the sheriff, John,” commanded Dan, suddenly deciding the matter. “And tell father about it, if he asks. But Billy and I will follow the robbers.”

“Say! them three villings was powerful mean to me,” objected the boatman. “What they’d do to a couple of boys——”

“We needn’t get into a tussle with them,” said

Dan, quickly. "We'll just get on their trail—if we can."

"We can," cried Billy, confidently, and ran out of the cabin at once.

His brother was soon after him. They unleashed the bigger iceboat and pushed her off from the dock. There was a strong gale blowing, but they had been out in some pretty keen blows with the *Fly-up-the-Creek*, and knew well how to manage her.

"Sure they went up stream?" asked Dan, as he helped Billy raise the big sail.

"Pos-i-tive!"

"Then—— We're off! Look out for yourself, Billy, when the boom swings over."

Dan barely caught the stern of the craft and scrambled in. The wind had filled the canvas suddenly, and she shot out from the dock. He had her in hand in a minute, however, and sent the boom creaking over and they got upon the right tack.

Almost at once the iceboat set a pace that made the boys cower and cling as they could to the rocking, wrenching timbers of the craft. The gale did not show its fury until they were well out of the lee of the land.

Then the boys discovered that it was snowing, too. The few flakes that had whistled past them while they were riding down to the dock had

gathered in infinite numbers now. The gale whipped them along so speedily that they did not seem to touch the ice at all; yet the air was soon filled with hurrying, stinging ice particles which blinded them.

Somewhere ahead they believed three robbers were flying up the river in the stolen motor ice-boat. Of course, they would carry no lamps, and it would be difficult to see the runaway until they were right upon it.

But if they continued to use the motor Dan and Billy knew they would soon be able to place the *Follow Me*. They strained their ears to distinguish the put-put-put of the exhaust.

CHAPTER XV

ON ISLAND NUMBER ONE

DAN SPEEDWELL, naturally more thoughtful than his brother, realized immediately that they were up against a difficult proposition.

The storm was gathering rapidly and through the curtain of snow it was impossible to see far. It was true the falling flakes lightened the scene greatly; yet they interposed a white wall that was impenetrable a few yards beyond the bow of the iceboat.

In which ever direction the thieves had gone with the *Follow Me*, the pursuers' only chance of overtaking them was to follow by sound—not sight. Therefore the thickly falling snow did not balk the Speedwell boys much. It only would serve to deaden the sound of the motor iceboat's engine.

Although the bulk of the falling snow was swept on upon the breast of the gale, and little stuck to the ice, the big iceboat made less noise than usual. Her shoes did not clog; but the scale of new snow upon the river smothered the shriek of the

steel. Billy, standing on the crossbeam, strained his ears to catch the faintest sound from the motor of the boat they were pursuing.

If the robbers continued to use the motor only, both boys knew that the *Fly-up-the-Creek* would soon overhaul the stolen craft.

For they were now tearing up the river at a furious pace. On, on, on—the boat rocking and bounding—often shooting into the air completely when the runners struck a “hubbly” piece of ice—peeling the miles off under the runner-shoes with nerve-racking speed.

Directly they saw the gaunt outline of tree-tops on the right hand. They were passing some island; but which one, neither boy could have told at the moment. The usual landmarks were wiped out.

For what point along the upper reaches of the Colasha were the robbers headed? That was a disturbing query in Dan’s mind. Had the fellows prepared some hide-out for the motor iceboat, even before they had stolen her?

And the puzzle was: What did they want of the *Follow Me*? Was the robbery merely for the sake of keeping the Speedwell boys out of the regatta—which was now but a week away? Or, was the crime committed for an entirely different reason?

Unless the scoundrels removed the boat from

the river it would be rather difficult to hide her for long.

"But they can make us a whole lot of trouble—that's a dead certainty," muttered Dan, striving to clear his goggles of the wet and clinging snowflakes.

"D'ye hear anything, Dan?" yelled Billy at that moment.

"Not a thing."

"Crickey!" cried the younger boy. "Mebbe those fellers have run her under the ice."

Dan caught most of what his brother said, but only shook his head. Billy, as he stood clinging to the leather hand-hold, was outlined by the snow, which made his figure bulk hugely in the uncertain light.

Standing there, Billy should be able by now to hear the motor's exhaust—if ever! Unless, of course, the thieves had put canvas on the *Follow Me*, too.

Dan was trying to puzzle the thing out. If the robbery was solely for the purpose of putting him and his brother out of the regatta, why this long run up the river? Suppose the three men had merely motored over to one of the islands, or to the far shore of the river? There they could have hidden, or destroyed, her before this. A few strokes of an ax would have put an end to the usefulness of the motor and machinery on the stolen

boat—and *that* might have been done at Bromley's dock.

No; it looked very much to Dan as though, had the intention merely been to keep her out of the race, the thieves never would have taken the *Follow Me* out on the river on such a blustering night as this.

There was something else behind it. Because he believed that somebody had gotten hold of the plans he had drawn for the boat Dan, like Billy, had jumped to the conclusion that this incident was along the same line—that somebody who was afraid of their prowess wished to keep them out of the ice races.

His mind had suddenly shunted back to the repeated conversation between the strange man that afternoon on Bromley's wharf, and Old John himself. The man had connected him and Billy with Island Number One. There was a mystery about that island—and the unfortunate lad who spent at least a portion of his time in that locality.

The connection between this present affair and the stranger's conversation was suddenly clinched in Dan's mind. The mist of uncertainty which had bothered him was dissipated on the instant.

"Those fellows aren't trying to do us out of the races," he thought. "It's something about Island Number One and the dummy. They never

came up the river as far as this—and that's good reason why we don't hear the motor."

His decision brought about instant action. He yelled to Billy and the latter heard:

"Look out, boy! I'm going to swing her over!"

Dan took up the sheet and for a few moments the boat lost headway. Then the stiffened canvas filled again and they shot away on the other tack.

Billy shouted some objections; but Dan gave him little attention until he had swung her clear across the river and they were headed down stream, and on the other side of the chain of islands.

"Don't give it up! don't give it up, Dan!" begged the younger lad.

"I'm not. But I've got a hunch, Billy," returned Dan. "See where we are. What light is that?"

"Must be the light at Benzinger's Inn," sang out Billy, after a moment. "But it's hard to tell. Landmarks seem different when the river's frozen——"

"You're right! you're right!" cried Dan. "It's the Inn. I see the big oak beside it."

"That white staff——?"

"Yes. It's the snow makes it look so ghostly. Now we'll slip across nearer the islands."

"What for?"

"Because we're going to try to make Island Number One," declared Dan, emphatically.

There seemed to fall a lull in the gale. The iceboat creaked over the gathering drift of snow that had sifted down here and lay in a thick sheet upon the ice in the lee of the islands.

And how deep it was! How fast it had gathered! It actually amazed Dan and Billy that so much snow had banked up here in so short a time; for on the other side of the islands—between them and the river bank—there were but small, thin patches.

"There's Island Number One!" shouted Billy, pointing ahead.

Dan shook his head at his brother and put a finger for a moment on his own lips in warning.

The *Fly-up-the-Creek*, at greatly reduced speed, crossed the open space between the two islands. They saw nothing of the missing *Follow Me*; but in a very few minutes their own craft staggered into a tiny cove and the runners plowed into a two-foot drift.

Dan dropped the canvas, and it came down stiffly and creakingly. Billy trampled it into some sort of a bundle on the main beam of the craft. He grumbled meantime:

"What are you doin', Dan? We'll never catch those fellows—never!"

"How about if they're *here*?" queried Dan.

"Where's the *Follow Me?*"

"We'll look," grunted Dan, stamping his feet and trying to slap some life into his numbed hands.

"This is some storm, Dan."

"It sure is."

"Regular old blizzard—just as you said."

Dan seized his brother's arm suddenly, and held it tight. "What d'ye know about *that*, Billy?" he asked, pointing with his free hand into the tops of the snow-masked trees above them.

There was a faint, rosy glow just above the tree-tops on the high hogback of the island. This dim, ghostly light was twenty feet above the ground, at least, and all of forty feet above the ice where the two boys stood.

"That—that beats me!" chattered Billy.

"What does it look like?"

"A fire in the air."

"Isn't that just about where you thought you saw the smoke that other day?"

"I bet you!" gasped Billy. "A fire in the air," he repeated.

"No. The reflection in the air of a fire, I grant you," Dan chuckled.

"But—but—— Say, just what d'ye mean, Dan?"

"It means that there is somebody on this island," Dan said, gravely. "Whether it is that

poor dumb chap, or these robbers—or both!—we've got to find 'em."

"But the *Follow Me* isn't here," objected Billy, weakly.

"How do you know?" returned his brother. "Mean to tell me you can see all over this island—into every cove and inlet—from where we stand?"

"No-o——"

"Then don't be foolish, Bill! Maybe the boat isn't here. But I'm going to find out what that light means——"

"It's gone!" exclaimed Billy.

"Yep. The fire was so fierce for a minute that its rosy hue reflected on the smoke. We can't see the smoke now—the snow drives altogether too hard.

"Crickey, old man!" ejaculated Billy. "We'll be buried here if we stand much longer."

"Then let's keep moving. Come on!"

Dan started for the higher part of the island at once. It was a rocky, steep ascent, and the snow covering everything made the way more arduous. As they panted along Billy whispered:

"D'ye suppose that dummy and the three men that stole the boat are in cahoots, Dan?"

"Give it up," returned Dan. "But we'll find out."

"Maybe they'll treat us as badly as they did

Old John—if they're here," suggested Billy, showing more caution than usual.

"We'll be careful," said Dan, in the same low tone. "They won't be expecting us, I bet!"

"That's right. They'd never look for pursuit in this storm."

"B-r-r-r! I guess not," grumbled Dan. "It's not fit for a dog to be out in."

"Well—if there's a fire——"

"And there must be some shelter," added the older lad. "If it's only the dummy we'll get under cover all right."

"And let the *Follow Me* go?" groaned Billy.

"My goodness, Billy!" muttered Dan. "It's snowing so hard now that we could not see our hands before our faces. Lucky we beached the *Fly-up-the-Creek* as we did."

Just then Billy fell over something. It was a section of tree trunk. Beside it was quite a heap of split wood, too.

"What do you know about this?" asked Dan, helping his brother to his feet.

"Cord wood, by crickey!" exclaimed Billy.

"Sh!"

"But who's been cutting wood over here on this island——? Why! the dummy—if he's the one that's got the fire," muttered Billy, asking and answering his own question.

"Correct!" agreed Dan.

By this time they were among the trees that covered the backbone of the island. There was quite a thick grove at this point.

"Step softly," begged Dan.

"The snow will come pretty near deadening our footsteps," whispered Billy. "Hullo! here's a hollow stump."

"What's that?" exclaimed Dan, under his breath. "A hollow tree?"

"Stump, I said. About twenty feet high. It was a big tree once, you bet," whispered Billy. "When Lettie and I were ashore here the other day we found it. I know it's only a shell, for I pounded on it."

He lifted his fist, but Dan stopped him. "Don't pound on it now, you chump!" ordered the older boy.

He put out a tentative hand himself and touched the black tree trunk. He had already noticed that no snow clung to it. The bark was still on the wood and there was no mark to show that the big stump was hollow.

But when Dan placed his bare hand upon the bark it seemed to him as though the hollow stump was warm!

CHAPTER XVI

THE UNEXPECTED

THIS was both a startling and unexpected discovery. Dan gripped Billy's arm again, enjoining silence, and the two boys crept away from the vicinity of the hollow stump.

The rosy glow above its summit—the smoke rising above the tree-tops—the warmth of the dead tree, so that the snow did not stick to it while the rough bark of the live trees was now crusted with the fast falling flakes—these facts were all to be pieced together. And the dovetailing did not take long when Dan put his mind to it!

"It's a smokepipe—a chimney," he whispered.

"What is?" muttered Billy, puzzled.

"That hollow stump."

"Crickey! where's the fire?" demanded Billy, in amazement.

"Under the ground—somewhere. There's a cave—a den in the rocks. Somehow a smoke flue has been dug to the hollow tree——"

"If it was hot enough to reflect upon the snow

above the top," objected Billy, "the old tree would be afire."

"Not if they had lined it with clay, and baked the clay first," responded Dan.

"Gee, Dan! you've got a head!"

"I hope so," returned Dan, laughing.

"But could the dummy have done all that——?"

"How do we know who is in the cavern?" snapped Dan. "And take it from me—it was somebody beside that dumb fellow who contrived this hide-out. These people must be outlaws of some kind, Billy—surest thing you know!"

"Of course they are—if they stole our boat," agreed Billy.

"We don't know who they are," said Dan, thoughtfully. "And we don't know how to get into their camp, anyway. Goodness, Billy! maybe we'll wish we *did* know, even if they are pretty tough citizens. Where are we going to find shelter in this blizzard?"

The storm was increasing mightily. The snow drove down through the branches with a startled "sh-sh-sh." This drowned even the whining of the wind through the taller tree-tops.

The boys made little sound as they moved about, for the snow deadened every other noise. They stood together for some moments without speaking.

To be out in such a time as this was neither pleasant nor safe. The cold was stinging, and one might easily freeze to death on such a night. Even the idea of being covered up in the snow was no comfortable thought, although they might remain thus sheltered till morning without any serious injury. Many times Dan and Billy had uncovered their sheep after a serious snowstorm, and the lads knew that a snowdrift was porous and the heat of the body thus mantled would keep them from freezing.

"Besides," whispered Dan, at last, "we can find our way down to the boat again, and cover ourselves with a part of the sail."

"But how about this dummy?" muttered Billy. "Suppose he's alone? I believe he'd give us shelter."

"We'll look," agreed Dan. "But for goodness sake be careful."

"How are we going about it, Dan?"

"Round and round. Take that hollow stump for the center. We'll circle around until we find the entrance to his den."

"But Lettie and I were all over this island," objected Billy.

"You didn't know what you were looking for; did you?"

"Humph! I suppose not."

"Now we know," chuckled Dan. "We're

looking for a hole in the ground where there is a fire. Goodness! won't it be fine to be warm again?"

For the boys were badly chilled by now. Billy could scarcely keep his teeth from chattering.

From where they stood the boys could dimly see the black trunk of the hollow tree which Dan believed was the chimney of the mysterious den in the rocks.

"You go one way; I'll go the other. Don't lose sight of the tree," advised the older Speedwell.

They separated. The snow sifted down so thickly that it was not long before they lost sight of each other. It was no easy matter to get about among the boulders and roughage of the hillside. Big rocks cropped out in places; and there were many stumps, and masses of vines and bushes to trip them. That all these obstructions were pretty well masked in the fallen snow made the going all the harder.

Billy had every confidence in his brother's judgment; and it did seem as though Dan must be right about the cave and the strange chimney connected with it. Somewhere underneath where they trod was a warm hollow, sheltering, perhaps, only the boy whom they called "Dummy." If he was alone, Billy was sure he would give Dan and himself shelter.

But they wanted to be sure of that. Billy wasn't desirous of "mixing in" with those three masked robbers who had treated old John Bromley so roughly.

And so thinking, as he crept on over the higher part of the island above the hollow stump, Billy suddenly stepped right out into space. At least, so it seemed. He put his foot upon a bank of snow, and "slumped right in"!

The snow had treacherously filled a narrow cut between two boulders. Billy dropped to his chin in the soft, cold mass, and then found that he was wedged so tightly that he couldn't get out.

He dared not shout to Dan. *That* might be their undoing indeed. If there were men about whom they must perforce consider enemies, Billy was determined not to bring them out here.

So he struggled, and panted, and wrenched himself from side to side, and tried his very best to seize upon the edge of the rock above him and draw his body up. All to no purpose!

He was just as much a prisoner as though he were bound with cords. The snow was fast drifting over him, too. Billy was already badly chilled, and the thought of being covered completely by the snow made him shake all the more.

Indeed, he was in a bad way. He was too courageous to yell for his brother and thus run

the risk of attracting others in the neighborhood; but it did seem to Billy as though he were doomed to be smothered, standing erect between the two rocks.

Above the imperilled boy the snow whirled in ghostly forms. Like shrouded figures of lost spirits the snow drifted through the open grove, passing the frightened lad in a dreary procession. The "sh-sh-sh" of the falling flakes seemed now like an actual voice.

There came a white figure more certain in its outlines than the others. Billy struggled to raise himself again, his lips parted, tempted to shriek. The figure came nearer.

"Goodness gracious! what's the matter with you?" gasped Dan's anxious voice. "I've been hunting for you everywhere."

"Crickey! is that you, Dannie?" returned Billy. "I thought I was done for."

"Why didn't you yell?" demanded Dan, laying hold of his brother's wrists.

"And start something, maybe?"

"Well! you plucky young duffer," exclaimed Dan, in some pride. "Now! out you come!"

Billy lay panting at his feet for some moments. Dan examined the hole into which his brother had fallen.

"Don't suppose that's a way into the den, do you?"

"So—solid under my feet, Dan," gasped Billy. "That's no entrance, I bet."

"Come on, then. We'll keep together this time. Haven't found a sign of the way in yet."

They took a wider circle about the hollow stump. Stumbling on, arm in arm (for Billy was getting exhausted, although he would not own up to it), the Speedwells made another complete round without discovering anything.

The way was so rough that it was impossible to recall just where the hollow stump stood. The boys had reached the bottom of the hill and the shore of the island was near at hand. But in that direction they could see but a short distance. The snow was like a thick curtain before their eyes.

"Crickey, Dan!" groaned Billy. "We've lost it."

"Oh, I guess the old stump hasn't moved," said Dan, cheerfully. "It's up yonder—somewhere!"

At that moment they again caught sight of the rosy glow in the tree-tops. "See!" exclaimed Dan. "More heat. Jingo! that must be a great draft."

"They must have some way of shutting off the draft, and then opening it again," said Billy, in a puzzled tone. "There! it's gone."

"I've got it!" exclaimed Dan, suddenly. "I bet that's a forge."

"A forge?" repeated Billy, in wonder.

"They'd want a tall chimney for a forge on account of needing a strong draft," declared Dan. "That's what it is."

"But a forge in a cave?" queried his brother, doubtfully. "What for?"

"Ah! that's another question," returned Dan. "I don't see that far, yet."

But in secret Dan believed he had guessed the business of the men who had once, at least, occupied the cave, whether they were there now, or not. He said nothing to Billy about this, however.

The younger boy had stumbled into a heap of split wood. Dummy—or somebody else—had spent some time in preparing a great heap of fuel against just such a storm as this that now raged over the valley of the Colasha.

"And Dan," whispered Billy, eagerly, "wouldn't he have his woodpile pretty near to the door of the cave? What do you think?"

"I think you've got a good head on you," returned Dan, promptly. "Let's go careful here."

Right at hand was a thick, low clump of bushes. The snow was heaped upon and into this brush, until it was waist high, only the tops of the bushes sticking out.

And, strangely enough, there seemed to be a narrow path, crooked as a ram's horn, but quite

plain—through the midst of this brush-clump.

“Look there!” exclaimed the watchful Dan. “Leads right to the steep side of that rock. Come on.”

“But there’s no way of getting through that big boulder!” gasped Billy.

“Under it, perhaps,” ventured Dan.

He stooped as he spoke and tossed the snow aside. He got below the interlocked branches of the bushes, and knelt upon the stony ground. There *was* a sort of a tunnel under the brush. The ground was packed hard.

“By the paws of some wild animal that must have used this runway once,” whispered Dan. “It leads to his den.”

“I hope it isn’t at home,” chattered Billy.

“But there will be somebody else at home—sure! Come on—softly.”

In half a minute the two boys, Dan ahead, and both on hands and knees, had crept to the foot of the huge rock that seemed so impassable from a little distance.

Underneath the foot of the boulder, however, was a narrow passage entering the hillside. Without doubt it had once been the lair of a wild animal.

But Dan and Billy did not apprehend the appearance of any such tenant of the hollow in the hillside. It was long since any dangerous animal

had been seen in the woods about Riverdale.

And it was man that had built the fire. The two boys crept a little way into the passage and listened. In a moment they heard a high pitched voice—a voice shrieking, it seemed, in pain and fright. But the words—if words the person uttered—were quite unintelligible.

“What d’ye know about that?” whispered Billy, forgetting at once his own misfortunes. “There’s trouble up there——”

Again and again the shrieks echoed down the passage. Then followed the rough tones of a deeper voice. The man spoke in anger—there was no doubt of that—and instantly the shriller voice cried out again.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE DEN

"It's the dummy!" Dan exclaimed, in an awed voice.

"He's in trouble," agreed the trembling Billy. "Whatever will we do? There! hear him?"

"I wish we had a gun," muttered his brother.

"What for?"

"We're going to get into a fight in about half a minute," Dan declared. "That is—if we stay here."

"Let's get out then," said Billy. "Whatever it is——"

Again the piercing cries of the unfortunate dummy broke out.

"My goodness! I can't stand that," gasped Dan.

"Can we help him—do you think we can?" demanded Billy. "But let's not get into trouble ourselves——"

Again the shrieks. Dan scrambled forward up the passage, with Billy right after him. The boys could not remain quiet when a helpless human being was being tortured.

In a few moments they came out into a roomy cavity. The roof was high and dome-shaped. At the far side was a huge fireplace of rock and mortar, with a forge set into one side of it. There was a fire of charcoal in the forge as well as a heap of burning cordwood on the wide hearth.

At a glance the boys saw the whole picture. There were three rough looking men. Both Dan and Billy believed they were those who had robbed them of the *Follow Me* and had so ill-treated old John Bromley. But they were not masked now.

Two were holding the wildly shrieking lad the Speedwells knew as Dummy. The noise the unfortunate boy made drowned that made by the Speedwells in getting into the cave.

The back of the third man was toward the entrance. He was in command. "Give him another taste of it!" he ordered, just as Dan and Billy scrambled to their feet.

At once the other two swung the screaming boy up, and held the calves of his legs over the glowing coal on the forge.

The sight was too much for Dan Speedwell. He let out a yell, picked up a heavy stick of wood and charged the men. One he brought down at his first blow.

They dropped the dummy, who fell partly in

the fire, screaming and struggling. He overturned the forge as he fell. The two other men sprang at Dan.

Billy had found a shovel. He used this with good effect upon one of the men; but the other got Dan down and was choking him on the floor of the smoke-filled cavern.

"Come on, Dummy! Help us!" shouted Billy, whanging away with his shovel.

But either the scorched boy was too hurt, or too frightened, to assist those who had come to his rescue. Dan and Billy had all the fighting to do themselves.

And they had a very poor chance when the three men recovered from their surprise. The one first knocked down rose, kicked the weeping dummy out of the way, and dived for Billy with a roar of rage.

He tore the shovel out of the boy's hands and hit poor Billy just once across the shoulders. It nearly knocked the wind out of the lad and he staggered across the cave and fell against the wall.

Dan was by this time overpowered. The fight was over almost as soon as it had begun.

"What d'ye know about these kids buttin' in this way?" demanded one of the roughs. "Ought to give 'em both a taste of the fire, too."

"No! go easy!" advised the man who seemed to be the leader, in a cautious tone. "There must be somebody else near."

"Why so?"

"These kids wouldn't have been 'way out here alone. Maybe we're in bad, boys——"

But a cry from the third man stopped the other's mouth. The excited individual was hauling away the broken forge.

"Here we were trying to find out from Dummy where the box was hid, an' here she be! Look a' here, boys! What d'ye know about this?"

The others left Dan and Billy where they lay and rushed to the fireplace. Under the legs of the forge had been a loose stone in the hearth. One of the fellows pried it up. A cavity was revealed.

"We've got it! we've got it!" yelled one of the men.

"Shut up, I tell you!" exclaimed the leader of the three. "I tell you there must be somebody on this island besides these kids."

"Aw, don't be so scared, Tom. The kids just butted in. Friends of Dummy, properly. Didn't know no better."

"They'll know better now," grumbled the cautious one. "We gotter beat it."

"You bet," agreed one of his fellows.

Meanwhile two of the men were lifting out what the hollow under the hearthstone contained. This was a heavy box, some two feet square, bound with iron bands, and padlocked.

"Knock off the lock and let's see 'em!" exclaimed the more excitable fellow.

"No, we won't," declared the leader. "We gotter beat it."

"How'll we get away in this storm?"

"The wind's all right. We can get away just the way we come—sure."

"And these kids?" growled the other, eyeing the panting and bruised Speedwell boys with much disfavor.

"Leave 'em here with Dummy."

"They'll set the officers after us in short order."

"Not if these two lads were foolish enough to come here to the island alone," growled the first speaker.

"Huh! Going to tie 'em up—eh?"

"You bet. And Dummy, too. They can stop here a while and be company for each other," and the fellow laughed in anything but a comforting way.

Dan and Billy were badly frightened, whether the dummy was, or not. The latter nursed his scorched legs in one corner. The Speedwell boys lay side by side in another. There wasn't the

first chance for them to escape, and the brothers knew it.

"We butted in where we had no call to, *this* time," muttered Billy, in despair.

They had not long to wait. The three robbers had come to the island for just one thing, and they had found it. Whatever was in the padlocked box, they seemed delighted to have it.

Dan had joked about there being treasure buried on the island; but that is exactly what there was—so Billy thought. Dummy had been left to guard it, and was to show the hidden box to somebody. But these three ruffians were not the people who had any right to it.

This was easy to understand. And Dummy, although he had screamed and would not put up a fight, was brave in his way. He had suffered torture rather than show these men where the box had lain.

Now two of the fellows seized him once more, and the poor chap screamed again. They only bound him, however—but they bound him so tightly that he had good reason to cry out.

It was so with Dan and Billy, in turn, as well. At wrists and ankles the three boys were lashed with strong fishline, that cut into the flesh. It was impossible to stretch their bonds at all without lacerating their wrists and ankles.

Dan and Billy were thankful the scoundrels

did not gag them as they had John Bromley earlier in the evening. Yet, who would hear them shout down here in the bowels of the island?

They saw the three men leave the cave, dragging the heavy box with them. One of them came back after a moment, made sure for the last time that the bonds of the trio of captives were all right, and then he, too, disappeared.

The boys were alone in the cavern.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN EVENING DRIVE

ALTHOUGH the weather had been threatening all day, Mildred Kent went over to Lettie Parker's house after supper, as she had promised. There had been no school for several days, but the girls were just as busy as Dan and Billy Speedwell. They were hard at work finishing certain Christmas presents.

To tell the truth, Lettie's present was for Billy Speedwell, and was a handsome silk scarf—thick and warm—that the bronze-haired girl had been at work on for several days. Now her nimble fingers flew as she sat and gossiped with the doctor's daughter. Meanwhile the latter was completing the initials "D. S." she was embroidering in the corners of six very handsome handkerchiefs.

"And there's another thing, Milly," Lettie was saying, "that I want to see Billy about. There's something going on up at Island Number One, and they say Dan and Billy know about it."

"What do you mean?" asked Mildred, calmly.

"Something queer. You know what the boys said about that fellow they call 'Dummy'?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, Sheriff Kimball told my father that the Speedwells are at the island a good deal, and that the dumb boy is a member of a gang of outlaws. Now, what do you think of *that*?"

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Mildred, her eyes very big and round.

"It's not nonsense at all. I'm telling you the truth," said the bronze-haired young lady, sharply.

"Of course. I don't mean that you are not telling the truth. But this sheriff must be crazy to believe that Dan and Billy would know any outlaws. What kind of outlaws?"

"I'm sure I don't know. But Sheriff Kimball has been twice to see father about it. Dan and Billy are bound to get into trouble if they don't look out."

"How ridiculous. I don't believe there is anybody on the island."

"We saw that dummy ourselves," declared Lettie, her lips pursed.

"But you went all over the island with Billy afterward. You didn't find any hiding place."

"The sheriff says it's there. He has reason to know, he states. There was some man—so he says—who broke with the outlaws and 'turned

State's evidence,' he calls it. Sheriff Kimball says he has been waiting for two months for this boy who can't talk very well to come and see him. The man who confessed said he would send all the evidence by this dummy. And you know he was at Billy's house and the boys never told the sheriff——"

"Why should they?" demanded Mildred, startled.

"Well, you know what the boys said about finding a slip of paper after the dummy went away, and what was written on the paper? It said: 'Buried on the island. Dummy will show you the spot.' Sheriff Kimball says that doubtless referred to the evidence Harry Biggin meant him to have."

"Harry Biggin?"

"That's the name of the man who broke with the outlaws and is helping the officers get the crowd."

"He's an informer," asserted Mildred, with scorn.

"But that doesn't help the matter any. If Dan and Billy have foolishly got themselves mixed up in it——"

"Mixed up in *what*?" demanded Mildred, with some heat. To Mildred Kent's mind it was impossible that Dan Speedwell could ever be in any real trouble—that is, trouble that came about

through his not being "perfectly straight." Billy, perhaps, might be foolish; but never Dan!

Just as she spoke there was a jingling of sleigh bells at the door of the Parker house. There had been little sleighing this winter, save on the river; but a couple of days before, a trifle of snow had fallen—enough to crust the Riverdale streets and the drives in and out of the town.

"Here's Mr. Kimball now—I do believe!" cried Lettie, jumping up and running to a front window. "Yes! he said he was going up the river to the Biggin place, and he'd stop for father——"

"This Harry Biggin," said Mildred, suddenly. "Is he one of those farmers on the other side of the river?"

"Yes. They own that big place near Meadville, only on the other bank."

"And he says Dan and Billy are connected with robbers—or outlaws—or something——"

"I never said so!"

"I'm going to ask Mr. Kimball what he means, then," said Mildred, firmly, and putting aside her work she arose and went quickly to the hall door.

Mr. Parker was welcoming the sheriff at the door. The latter was a tall, thin and wiry man, dressed in a long gray ulster belted at the waist. If old John Bromley could have seen him he

would have immediately recognized the man he had driven away from his dock while the Speedwells were trying out their new motor-iceboat.

"Hullo!" said the jolly county clerk. "It's only my girl and her chum. How are you, Milly?" and he pinched the cheek of the doctor's daughter.

But Mildred was too anxious to be anything but direct. "Oh! I beg your pardon, sir," she said, to the man in the ulster. "But are you the sheriff?"

"Of course he is!" chuckled Mr. Parker. "Have you some mysterious evidence you want to put before him——"

"That's just what she's got, Dad!" cried Lettie, giggling.

"I'll be glad to take up any case Miss Mildred has to offer," said the county official, his eyes twinkling.

"It isn't that. I want to know about Dan and Billy Speedwell. They *can't* have done anything wrong——"

"There it is again, Kimball," exclaimed the county clerk, slapping the sheriff on the shoulder. "You start anything about Dan and Billy in this neighborhood, and even the girls will be after you."

"But what's their game up there at the island?"

"They have no game there," said Mildred, with a very determined look.

"And at that old fellow's wharf up the river. I'm not known much around that section. I'm from the other end of the county, and having only been in office six months, everybody doesn't know I'm sheriff," and Mr. Kimball laughed.

"To-day I was watching Island Number One for—well, for a reason. I saw those two boys racing over there in a most marvelous iceboat run by a motor——"

"Oh, jolly!" exclaimed Lettie, breaking in. "They've built the new boat, then."

"Wait, Kimball," interposed Mr. Parker. "Tell the girls something more. I can see Mildred is interested."

"She is if you are going to arrest Billy and Dan Speedwell," laughed Lettie, who was just as full of fun as her father, and was not above teasing her chum on occasion.

"Well, I tell you!" exclaimed the sheriff, smiling. "I'm in a hurry. The Biggins, like all farmer folk, go to bed early, and I hear that Harry has dared creep home again and may be there to-night. I'm in a hurry, as I say; but I've got a two-seated sleigh here, and plenty of robes, and about the fastest pair of horses in this county—raised 'em myself. What say if we all—you, too, Parker—drive up the river, and on the way

I'll explain how the Speedwells seem to be mixed up with the Steinforth counterfeiting gang."

"The Steinforth counterfeitters?" gasped Mr. Parker. "That's more than you've told me before, Kimball."

"Yes. But it seems we have about got things to a head now. Something is going to break soon, and I'll risk talking a little. Want to go, Parker?"

"We'll go," said Mr. Parker, looking at the girls. "Just 'phone your mother, Milly, that you are going sleighing with me."

"That's all right," said the sheriff, with a boyish laugh, and he ran out to spread the robes for the girls in the rear seat. Not a flake of snow had fallen yet, but the night was starless, and the wind cut sharply.

They got under way in ten minutes. The black horses were young and they had been standing in the stable behind Appleyard's all day, and were very restive. The girls squealed a little as they clipped the corners going down to the open ice.

From River Street a path had been made down to the shore. It was an easy slant and the runners of the sleigh fairly pushed the horses on their haunches.

"Easy, boys! *now* we have it!" cried the sheriff, coaxingly. He handled the colts as though he loved them, and they tossed their heads, and pricked their ears forward, and seemed to know

that he would let them out in a minute and give them a chance to show their mettle.

Their shoes had just been sharpened, and when they clattered out upon the clear ice they left little marks every time their dancing hoofs landed.

That did not seem to be often, at the pace they took when first Mr. Kimball let them out. They whipped the sleigh behind them as though it was of a feather's weight. The two little lamps—one set at each side of the dash—sent twinkling, narrow rays of yellow light along the ice, glistening on each little imperfection. It seemed as though where the light fell a trail of stardust had been laid.

But there were no other lights upon the ice. With the keen wind blowing stronger, none of the boats were out from the Boat Club cove where all but the Speedwells' craft were kept. And there were few skaters out on the river to-night.

For several miles—until they had swung past the lower end of Island Number One, indeed—Mr. Kimball had no chance for much talk. The girls were delighted with the drive now.

"It's almost as good as being on the boys' ice yacht," declared Lettie.

"And now, what about the Speedwells and this Steinforth counterfeiting gang, Kimball?" demanded Mr. Parker, laying a hand upon the sheriff's arm.

CHAPTER XIX

LOST IN THE BLIZZARD

"I've got nothing against the lads," explained the sheriff, sitting sideways on the front seat after bringing the horses down to a more quiet pace, and speaking so the girls on the back seat could hear him. "But some things I have heard make me suspicious.

"They seem to have had something to do with a boy called 'the Dummy'—he's been to their house, you know. You told me so yourself, Parker."

Mildred flashed Lettie a sharp glance and the red-haired girl had the grace to blush. So it had been *her* chattering to her father of what the Speedwell boys had told them about the island, and Dummy, that had set the sheriff to looking up Dan and Billy.

"This dummy seems to be the important link in our case against Steinforth and his co-operators. Most of the gang were arrested months ago by the Federal officers. But the engraving plates they worked from and a lot of finished notes, as well as a coiner's outfit, were cached by the outlaws before their arrest.

"Now, this Biggin, and the dummy, who is his nephew——"

"Oh! is he *really* dumb?" cried Lettie, curiously.

"No. Dreadfully tongue-tied, I believe. A good person to trust a secret to, for he couldn't tell it easily," and the sheriff laughed.

"But is the poor boy really a criminal?" asked Mildred, faintly.

"Why—as to that—— No! I fancy he is attached to Biggin. And Biggin was never really a member of Steinforth's gang. Biggin drinks—that's his failing. He used to go off into the woods on lonesome sprees. That's how he fell in with the countefeiting gang, he told me.

"Well, when the Federal officers got close on the trail of the outlaws they hid the plates and other things I mentioned, and sort of left Biggin in charge of the camp. But at once all the sheriffs in the State got busy. There's a good, big reward offered for the discovery of the evidence the authorities need to convict the gang.

"After Biggin talked with me, he got scared. He wrote me he'd send the dummy to lead me to the place where the plates, and so forth, were cached. But he never came to me—the dummy didn't, I mean.

"Now, what you tell me, Parker, about the

Speedwells meeting and being friendly with Biggin's nephew, has made me suspicious——"

"I'm sorry if it made you suspicious of Dan and Billy," said the county clerk. "No need."

"That may be. But they go out to that island—and I believe the dummy is on the island part of the time. It may be, from what you tell me about the paper the Speedwells say he dropped, that the engraving plates and the other stuff is hidden on that Island Number One."

"You haven't any reason to suspect Dan and Billy, just the same," declared Mildred, promptly.

Both the sheriff and Mr. Parker laughed. "Now, don't you put me in your bad books, Miss Milly," begged Sheriff Kimball. "I don't mean to cause the boys any trouble. I am hoping to-night to catch Harry Biggin and make him talk plainly. That's the object of this trip—although it is a pleasure to take you young ladies for a drive," and he laughed again.

He spoke to the horses then, and the blacks switched their tails and "let out a notch" in their speed. They seemed as eagerly desirous of covering the distance to the Biggin farm in a short time as their master.

The girls cowered down behind the high back of the front seat, and so had the wind broken for them. But it was awfully cold. Now and then a flake of snow slanted down upon them, and the

girls' shoulders were nicely powdered before the sheriff turned the horses' heads toward the far side of the river, and they found an easily sloping bit of bank up which they could drive.

This was beyond the last of the string of islands, and the lights of Meadville—on the other bank—were in sight. Just ahead, as the horses struggled into a well traveled highway, where the runners gritted on the half-bare ground, was a lamp in a window.

"Biggin's place," said the sheriff. "And the folks are up yet."

The snow was gathering by this time, for it had taken them more than two hours to drive from Riverdale, spry as the horses had been. And, without doubt, the blacks were glad of the breathing spell promised them when the sheriff drove directly under the wind-shelter beside the farmhouse. This shed offered a warm spot even to the guests the sheriff had brought.

"Don't want to take you to the house till I find out how the land lies," he whispered, handing the reins to Mr. Parker, and slipping out from under the robe.

"O-o-o! doesn't it make you feel de-lic-i-ous-ly shivery?" whispered Lettie to the doctor's daughter. "Just like being on a regular man-hunt with the sheriff? We're his posse."

"Goosey!" returned Mildred. "I'm on the

point of shivering, all right. But only from cold."

"Are you well wrapped up, girls?" asked the county clerk.

"Oh, yes, sir," answered Mildred. "And the bricks are still warm at our feet. But I'm afraid it's going to snow dreadfully hard."

"What's a little snow?" demanded the careless Lettie. "Who's afraid?"

"I wouldn't want to be caught out on the river in a heavy storm—would you, sir?" asked Mildred of Mr. Parker.

"It's a straight road home," said the gentleman, quite as careless as his daughter. "The river ought to be better than the road, as far as *that* goes."

"But just suppose we got turned around in this snow?" Mildred objected, turning her head to watch the flakes falling thicker every moment. "*Did* you ever see it snow so hard, Lettie?"

"Lots of times—sure. Don't be a 'fraid cat, Milly."

The doctor's daughter kept her fears to herself thereafter. Mr. Parker produced a vacuum bottle filled with hot milk. He had been thoughtful enough to supply himself with that before leaving the house for this long ride. The hot drink helped the girls immensely.

"Now I can stand anything," declared Lettie,

happily. "When are we going to be called into action by the sheriff, Pa?"

"He *does* seem a long time; doesn't he?" returned her father, as the horses stamped, and shook their heads, and tinkled the bells on the harness.

Finally they heard a door shut, and in a moment Sheriff Kimball appeared. He looked pretty serious in the light of the sleigh lamps.

"What do you know about that?" he said, crossly. "They swear Harry hasn't been here, and invited me to search the house for him. And I did it, too. I've got it in for that boy, when I *do* catch him. He's only scared; but he knows more hide-outs in the wild country between here and Barnegat than anybody else. He's run wild in the woods most of his life.

"He left a message for me, though. Tells me to go to Island Number One and see the dummy. Now, I've been there—twice. I couldn't find hide nor hair of that boy either time."

"We might stop going back?" suggested Mr. Parker.

"I mean to. But, I declare! it's come on to snow hard."

"Oh, a little snow won't hurt us. We're neither sugar nor salt," cried Lettie. "And chasing outlaws is awfully interesting," and she giggled again, seeing her chum's serious face.

"I guess we won't wait long at that island to-night," observed Sheriff Kimball, when he had backed the sleigh out of the shed and got the impatient horses headed around again.

"Will you go back by the river, or the road?" asked Mr. Parker.

"Oh, the river. This road is half bare yet, you see," as the runners scraped over a "sand-bar." "We'll slip along on the ice twice as fast, you know. Come up, Dandy! Steady, Poke!"

The blacks got into step and they spun away along the short stretch of road and then down upon the river. At first they did not realize how hard the wind was blowing, being sheltered to a degree by the high bank. But when Mr. Kimball headed out into the middle of the stream, intending to cross to the Riverdale side of the river, the travelers quickly discovered that they were in the heart of a severe storm.

"Some blow—eh?" shouted Mr. Parker, into the sheriff's ear.

"This is a bad storm, Parker. I—had—no—idea——"

He was having trouble with his spirited team. The gusts of wind which drove the snow down upon them, fired the blacks with a desire to run. They ran in the right direction for a while; but soon they were winded, for the sleigh pulled heavily through the gathering drifts.

There were flaws in the gale. Suddenly the wind shifted from point to point of the compass. The two men could not see a light upon either bank of the river. Indeed, before long it was difficult to know whether the horses were dragging them down the stream, or up.

The snow fell faster and faster. The girls, locked in each other's arms on the rear seat, were covered with a fresh blanket. They did not know that the men in front robbed themselves to do this.

The cold was penetrating—horribly so! Now and then a swirling, whirling eddy of wind and snow fell upon the sleigh, the horses, and all, and well nigh turned them around. The men were choked by the storm; the horses snorted and plunged, and were able to move on but slowly.

"Dickens of a mess we've got into, Kimball!" shouted Parker in the sheriff's ear.

"I'm sorry I ever suggested taking these children with us. It's awful, Parker," said the worried sheriff.

At that instant there came a sudden lull in the storm. The wind fell, and the soft "sh-sh-sh" of the snow seemed rather soothing. But there was a sharper sound discernible, now that the tempest was lulled.

"Put! put! put-a-put!"

160 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

“What d’ye know about that?” cried the county clerk, seizing the sheriff’s arm. “It’s a motor—what?”

“It is. It’s that motor-iceboat. I heard it to-day when the Speedwells were trying it out.”

“Then it’s Dan and Billy,” declared Mr. Parker. “Well, now! what do you think of that? Out on the river in such a storm. Shall we shout to them?”

“My goodness, do!” cried Lettie, poking her head over the back of the seat. “If Billy Speedwell is out there, he’ll know the way home—sure. Let’s *all* shout, Pa!”

CHAPTER XX

"NEVER SAY DIE!"

IT was, of course, Billy who first found his tongue after the three robbers had left the trio of boys bound in the cavern on Island Number One.

"We got into a nice mess this time; didn't we?" he complained.

Dan was silent; and it was not strange that the tongue-tied youth was likewise dumb.

"We'll have a nice time getting away, too," growled Billy. "Dad will have something to say about it, Dan. He'll have to go on the milk route in the morning——"

"Is that all that's worrying you?" demanded Dan, in his quiet voice.

"Well!"

"If the storm continues, and nobody gets out here to the island to find us, it looks to me as though we'd be in quite a pickle. What do *you* think? Getting the milk to the customers around Riverdale isn't bothering me."

"Crickey! we'll be hungry bye and bye, I suppose," admitted Billy.

"We must find some way of getting out of this place, or we'll be more than hungry. Can you stretch those cords a little bit, Billy?"

"Crickey!" exclaimed the younger lad again. "I've done all of that I want to. Don't you see my wrists are bleeding?"

"I know, Billy. So are mine. And Dummy——"

He rolled over with an effort to look at the strange lad. The latter was weeping softly, the tears running unchecked down his dusty face. His legs still hurt him most woefully, without doubt.

"Well," grunted Dan, "I guess we needn't look to *him* for much help. If we are going to get out of this mess, Billy, we've got to do it ourselves."

"I have a sharp knife in my pocket, Danie——"

"So have I. Sharper than yours. But how'll we get at either of them—and how use them?" demanded Dan.

"Well! what else is there?"

"Let me think," said Dan.

"A lot of good thinkin' will do us," growled Billy.

"Never say die!" quoted Dan. "There's got to be a way out of it."

"Out of this cave? Sure!" snorted his

brother. "The way we came in. And I wish to goodness we hadn't come in at all!"

"They'd have burned Dummy badly if we hadn't."

"And is he any better off? Besides," added Billy, "those scamps got what they were after, just the same. What do you suppose was in that box, Dan?"

"Ask Dummy," suggested Dan, with a grim smile.

"Huh! And how far will they get with the box through this storm?"

"Maybe the storm has eased up," said Dan. "If they try to walk to the shore—either shore—they'll have a job; for I fancy there is a lot of snow on the ice by this time."

"They said they'd take our boat," declared Billy.

"And they'll have a nice time sailing her through the drifts."

"Just the same, they are better off than we are right now," declared Billy.

Dan only grunted. He had been at work during the past few minutes, and was rolling himself over and over on the floor.

"My gracious!" exclaimed his brother, "do you expect one part of this hard floor is any better than another?"

Dan made no reply. Billy and the dummy

watched him. Dan was gradually working himself near to the hearth.

The overturning of the forge with the live coals in it had done no harm, after the smoke had cleared away. There was nothing for the coals to set afire. But the heap of ash-covered coals was still hot underneath.

Dan was very well aware of this; yet Billy saw him rolling quite close to the embers. He called out:

"Look out, Dan! You'll be burned!"

"Never mind yelling about it," growled the older youth, between his set teeth.

He knew he had a peculiarly unpleasant job to perform; but Dan was just brave enough to do it. Once he had won a motorcycle race with flames eating into his leg while he covered the last lap—and he bore the scar of that yet.

He judged his distance well, gritted his teeth, and rolled close to the heap of embers. He could feel them scorching his back, while his tied wrists were right over the stirred embers.

At once a flame sprang up. There was the smell of scorching flesh. Billy, suddenly understanding what his brother was about, screamed aloud as though it were *he* who was being burned.

He tried to throw himself across the floor of the cave to reach Dan, by his action forcing the cords deeper into his own flesh.

And then Dan Speedwell flung himself over and over on the floor, still silent but in evident agony. His hands, however, were free!

"Oh, Dan! Dan!" sobbed Billy. "What have you done?"

He wouldn't have cried for himself; but that his brother should have sacrificed himself in this way cut Billy to the heart.

"I know what I've done," said Dan, shakenly, at length sitting up and trying to get a hand into his trousers pocket. "I know what I've done. I've made a chance for us to get free. Shut up your bawling, Billy! Somebody had to do it."

He got out the knife, despite his burned wrist—and the burn was deep and angry. The skin of both wrists for at least half the way around was scorched.

Dan's face worked with pain as he opened the blade, then cut the cords that bound his own ankles, using both hands. It hurt him dreadfully to use his hands at all.

But he was free, and he proceeded at once to free the other boys. Billy fairly hugged him, when once his arms were loose again.

"Oh, Dan! you're the best fellow—the very *best* one!—who ever lived," he cried. "I wouldn't have had the pluck to do that——"

"Shucks!" grunted Dan. "Yes, you would. You didn't just happen to think of it. We've got

to get out of here quick, it seems to me; we couldn't wait for rescue."

"But in this storm——?"

"Well, if those fellows dared venture out into the blizzard, I guess we can follow them; can't we?" the older Speedwell demanded.

"Follow them!"

"Of course. I'm not going to lose the *Follow Me* if I can help it. And that box, too——"

"We don't know what's in it!" cried Billy.

"Whatever it was, it didn't belong to them," cried Dan, his eyes flashing with anger.

"Ask Dummy," suggested Billy, as Dan bent over the other boy to cut his lashings. Dan did so. But all they got was a mumble which meant nothing, and many head shakes.

"Oh!" cried Dan, "I don't believe he knows."

"And yet he had charge of it?"

"Of the box?"

"Well, didn't he? Remember that paper he dropped at our house? He was taking that message to somebody—and it wasn't to any of those three who got the box—not much!" exclaimed Billy.

"He did his best to keep the place secret from those who shouldn't know, I reckon," Dan agreed.

"I bet something *big* depends upon that box."

"Money in it!" exclaimed Billy, his eyes sparkling.

"Never mind *what*. Those fellows oughtn't to have it. Let's find out where they've gone."

"Oh, I'm with you, if you're bound to try following them," agreed Billy. "But not before you've had those wrists bound up. I've a clean handkerchief in my pocket."

"Guess your own wrists need a little attention, too," returned Danny, making a grimace of pain. "And how about Dummy's legs?"

The kettle, hung on the hook over the open fire, was steaming cheerfully all this time. Dan threw on some more wood, and Billy unhung the kettle and poured some water into a pan. They laved the burns with just as hot water as they could bear, to take the sting out.

Dummy's trousers were burned in great holes between his ankles and his knees. His legs were merely scorched and blistered, however; his burns were not as deep as Dan's.

Billy had crawled out of the cave for some snow with which to fill the kettle and reduce the temperature of the water poured into the pan. He reported the snow as blinding and the wind howling in the higher trees like a pack of wolves.

"If those fellows got away from this island, they've got pluck—that's all I got to say," he grunted.

"You bet they got away," Dan returned, quickly. "Otherwise they'd be back here to the

cave—don't you see? No other place of shelter; is there, Dummy?" he asked the third boy.

The latter shook his head vigorously. He watched Dan with the eyes of a devoted dog. Evidently he was ready to fall down and worship Dan Speedwell.

It had been Dan who interfered and saved him from his captors. Dan had released him from his bonds. And now, it appeared, he was ready to follow the Speedwells in their attempt to trail the three robbers who had borne away the iron-bound chest.

"You understand, Dummy?" demanded Billy. "We're going to chase those men. Mebbe we'll have another fight with them."

He was whittling a handle on a husky stick of firewood, and showed by his motions what he purposed to do with the weapon if he caught up with the men who had so abused them.

It did not, however, shake Dummy's determination. He was ready to start when the Speedwell boys were ready.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CRY FOR HELP

AFTER the fight in the cave Dan and Billy were sore and tired, and their wrists and ankles very painful. But it seemed to them both that it was their business to follow the outlaws, if they could, and learn what disposition was made of the "treasure box," as Billy insisted upon calling the chest that had been hidden under the hearthstone in the cave.

Besides, the boys were very anxious about their new iceboat. The robbers, if they used it to get to the mainland, as they evidently intended, might hide the *Follow Me* where Dan and Billy would be unable to find it before the races, a week away.

"Though right now," Billy remarked, as they crept out of the passage leading into the cavern, "it doesn't look as though we'd hold iceboat races next week on the Colasha. Goodness, Dan! did you ever in your life see so much snow?"

"It's worse on this side of the island, don't you see?" said his brother. "The snow is drifting this way. The high back of the island breaks

170 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

the wind and the snow piles up here in drifts."

"But our *Fly-up-the-Creek* is on this side of the island," complained Billy. "She's buried a mile deep, I bet!"

The boys started up the hill, but the snow beat down upon them so heavily, and the wind was so boisterous, they were glad to lock arms. Although Dummy made a "bad botch" of talking, as Billy said, he proved to be pretty muscular and the trio got along famously until they reached the summit.

They had come in this direction because Dan pointed out that it was not likely the three robbers, burdened with the heavy box, would face the gale either with the *Follow Me*, or afoot.

"And I don't believe they will go towards Riverdale," he observed. "You see, they knew old John Bromley was stirring things up over the 'phone when they burst into his house and captured him. Although they left him bound, they realized that whoever John was 'phoning to would look the old man up pretty quick.

"Now, naturally, the whole of Riverdale would be aroused by the robbery—and it sure would be if we hadn't started right out after the *Follow Me*. Even now perhaps Bromley has called people up on the 'phone because we are out in the storm so long.

"So, it seems to me," concluded Dan, with an

effort, "that the three robbers are more likely to try for Meadville and the railroad."

Dummy nodded violently and tried to speak his agreement with this statement. Billy only grunted. He had all he could do to plow through the drifts without wasting any breath in discussion.

They got over the ridge and slid down the steep rocks for several feet until the island itself broke the force of the gale. The wind did not blow directly across the island, but the slant being from up stream the heights acted as a windbreak.

"Now where?" asked Billy, with a sigh.

"Listen!" commanded his brother, unexpectedly.

Dan held up his hand and all three strained their ears for several moments. Then, simultaneously, the trio heard again the sound that had startled Dan. It was the distant explosions of the motor—the motor of the *Follow Me!*

"They have taken her," growled Dan. "There they go," and he pointed up stream.

"But they're not so far away," returned the surprised Billy. "And it's more than an hour since they cleared out and left us in the cave."

"I guess they had trouble in digging the boat out of the snow and getting her started. It's a wonder the motor wasn't frozen up on a night like this."

It was in a sort of lull of the blizzard that they heard the explosions of the engine. Now the wind and snow swooped down again, and muffled the sound. But Dan started straight down the hill.

"Are you going after them?" yelled Billy.

"Surest thing you know!"

"I believe we're crazy! We'll be lost in this snow."

"Not much we won't," declared his brother.

"I've got a compass."

He showed it—a very delicately adjusted instrument which he kept in a case in his pocket. At the edge of the ice (there was not so much snow on this side of the island) he waited to hear the sound of the engine again. Then he took his bearings, and at once set forth into the storm.

This time Dan led, Billy hung to his coat-tail, and Dummy brought up the rear. Thus, keeping literally in touch with each other, they would not be likely to drift apart while battling with the elements. And battle they actually had to.

The moment they got from under the shelter of the island the snow and wind almost overwhelmed them. Never had the boys experienced such a gale. Sometimes they were beaten to their knees, and had they not clung together, one or the other surely would have been driven away and lost.

"No wonder those men have gotten no farther from the island!" yelled Dan, with his lips close to Billy's ear.

"Right-O!" agreed the younger boy. "And can we catch up with 'em?"

"We don't want to; we want to trail 'em," returned Dan.

On they pressed, taking advantage of every flaw in the gale. Had it not been for Dan's compass they would have become turned about and lost their way ere they had left the island behind them ten minutes.

The wind blew between the points of Island Number One and the next above it with such force that the boys made very slow progress. When at last they got in the lee of the second island, they stopped to breathe, and to listen.

They did not at once hear the exhaust of the engine on the *Follow Me*; but they *did* hear something else. Voices were shouting—seemingly far out on the frozen river.

Again and again they heard the sounds. "Ahoy! Ahoy!" came plainly to their ears. Then—and much to the Speedwells' amazement—the boys heard their own names called—and in accents whose note of peril was not to be doubted:

"Dan! Billy! Help us! Dan and Billy Spe-e-e-dwell! He-e-e-lp!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE BATTLE IN THE SNOW

BOTH Mildred Kent and Lettie Parker believed with the latter's father that the explosions of the engine near them in the storm meant that Dan and Billy Speedwell were near at hand.

The girls, tossing aside the sheltering robe and the accumulation of snow, stood up, too, and clinging to each other shrieked their boy friends' names into the sounding gale.

Their own cries might not have carried very far, save in the lulls of the tempest; but with the voices of Mr. Parker and the sheriff, they raised a cry that was certainly heard by whoever was working the motor iceboat through the blizzard.

The "put-put-put" came nearer. A hoarse hail reached the ears of the quartette in the sleigh.

Mr. Kimball had brought his horses to a dead stop. Indeed, the beasts were glad to breathe, although they were far from exhaustion. No better pair of colts, as Mr. Kimball said, were to be found in the county.

"I don't hear that engine now," cried Mr. Parker. "Have they stopped?"

He called again, then waited for an answer. The snow seemed to have smothered the sounds. Again Mildred and Lettie shrieked the names of Dan and Billy. They had every confidence in the boys being able to help them if they only heard.

There was another answer—this time nearer. "Got 'em!" cried the delighted Mr. Parker.

"I don't just see how they are going to help us," grumbled Mr. Kimball.

"Dan will find a way," asserted Mildred, now the most hopeful of the quartette.

The next moment a figure appeared in the swirling snow. But it was not Dan or Billy. It was much too tall for either.

"Hullo, there!" exclaimed the stranger, in a very hoarse voice. "What's the matter here?"

A second figure appeared before either Mr. Parker or the sheriff could answer. The second man said, quite as roughly as the first:

"Gals, by thunder! And a fine pair o' horses, Tom."

"You hit it right, Jake," said the first man. "And just what we want—hey?"

"I wouldn't try ter go on in that blamed old scooter—not much! And we won't have to lug the box."

"Shut up!"

"Aw, it's all right. This *is* luck——"

The sheriff interposed suddenly. "I take it you fellows consider that your meeting with us is providential; don't you?"

"Huh?" growled the first speaker. "You're slingin' fine language, I guess. What we means ter do is ter take the sled an' the hosses. That's all. And there won't be room for youse gents—or the gals."

"Why, you scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Parker. "What do you mean?"

"Cut that out!" commanded the man called Tom, stepping quickly to the county clerk's side of the sleigh.

Lettie screamed. The man grabbed Mr. Parker by the collar and dragged him out of the sleigh. Mr. Parker shouted aloud in his anger, and tried to grapple with the man, but was struck a hard blow with a short club, or piece of gas pipe, by the other man. For the moment he was knocked almost senseless.

The sheriff was not frightened, however. He dropped the reins and leaped to the ice, where the snow was now almost knee deep.

"Get down in the sleigh, girls—down!" he commanded. "Look out for bullets! Hands up, you two fellows—put your hands up, quick! Quick, I tell you, or I'll fire!"

He had drawn a pistol and his tone was so earnest that the men must have known that he would use it. They were amazed for the moment.

"I am the sheriff of this county. I believe you are two fellows for whom I have been looking. Tom Davis—Scar-Faced Tom—I recognize you from the warden's description. You were discharged from the Meadville penitentiary only a week ago, and it looks very much to me as though you were going back there again."

The man whom the sheriff addressed—the redoubtable "Scar-Faced Tom"—was not a little cowed by the sheriff's speech—and extremely so by the business-like look of the revolver. But while Mr. Kimball kept this fellow under surveillance, and Mr. Parker was still lying stunned in the snow, the other fellow dived into the darkness and the storm, yelling for the third, who had remained with the motor iceboat.

The sheriff sent a pistol ball after him; but he would better have refrained. Tom Davis, seizing his opportunity (as he thought) made a great stride for the sheriff as the flame of the discharged revolver flashed right over his shoulder.

Davis would have had Kimball by the throat had it not been for the county clerk. The latter struggled to a sitting posture just at the right moment, and seized the villain's ankle. He twisted it and, roaring, the man went down.

Sheriff Kimball tossed his pistol to Mr. Parker, and jumped on the fallen robber's back. His attack was so unexpected that the other was helpless and it seemed as though the sheriff was going to make one capture, at least, without much trouble.

Mildred and Lettie were about as scared as they could be. The firing of the sheriff's pistol, and the rough tones and fighting seemed terrible to both the doctor's daughter and her chum.

Once Mildred had been troubled by tramps in the swamp up near Karnac Lake; but Dan had rescued her at that time. So it was not strange that now she should cry aloud:

"Oh, dear, me! I wish Dan were here."

"And I'd like to know what's got Billy Speedwell!" rejoined her chum. "Do you suppose these awful men have stolen the boys' new ice-boat?"

"Oh! they're wicked enough to do anything," gasped Mildred.

Mr. Parker was staggering to the sheriff's assistance. But before he reached him he dropped the pistol in the snow. In the darkness and storm it was not easy to find the weapon again; and while he was scrambling about on all fours to obtain it, two figures dashed out of the smother and fell upon him. The second robber and his mate had returned.

They overpowered Mr. Parker in a moment. Then they hauled Mr. Kimball off the prostrate ex-convict; but in that minute the sheriff had choked the fellow into subjection.

He could not rise to help his comrades. Mr. Parker and the sheriff faced but two of the gang, but the latter had the advantage.

Mr. Parker was not used to such rough work. The sheriff, however, was a quick and agile man, ready for almost any emergency which might arise.

He was, too, one of those men who "never give up till the last gun is fired." He kept on fighting, and the two robbers found him hard to subdue. Suddenly Mr. Parker went down under a swing of the blackjack that had previously felled him.

"Oh! my father! My father!" shrieked Lettie, who was peering over the back of the sleigh. "Billy! Billy Speedwell! Why don't you help us?"

She screamed this last question at the top of her voice, and it did not go unanswered. First aroused by the explosions of the motor iceboat engine, and led on by the shouting of the girls and their guardians in the sleigh, the two Speedwell boys and Dummy had come near to the scene of the battle in the snow just as the sheriff fired his pistol.

The boys recognized the girls' voices, and also Mr. Parker's.

"Mildred!" exclaimed Dan, in amazement. "She's in trouble."

"And that's Let—as sure as shooting!" agreed Billy. "And her father."

Dummy said nothing, but he kept on with his new friends—and he had to travel some to keep up with them. For neither the wind nor the snow retarded the Speedwells just then.

As the two robbers sprang upon Mr. Parker and the sheriff for the second time, Dan, Billy, and Dummy appeared. The Speedwells gave a great shout and plunged into the affray, swinging their clubs. Dummy kept in the rear, but he helped some in the end. The man, Tom Davis, whom the sheriff had overpowered, began to stir. The Dummy ran to him and threatened him with the club he had brought from the cave on Island Number One.

The battle in the blizzard was soon over. The three rascals were down in the snow, rubbing their heads, and begging for mercy almost as soon as reinforcements in shape of the three boys appeared.

CHAPTER XXIII

DUMMY "GETS IN GOOD"

THERE was not a weapon found on the three robbers, save the blackjack. The sheriff's pistol was lost; but once the gangsters had been subdued, they made no effort to attack their captors again.

Besides, Billy and Dummy stood over them with their clubs while Dan took one of the dim lights from the sleigh and went through the storm to find the iceboat on which the thieves had reached the spot.

He found it, got some rope, and the wrists of the three captives were tied behind them. And as Dan and Billy were the ones who did the tying you may be sure they made the bonds quite as taut as their own had been!

"I don't see as those fellows have done her any harm, Billy," the older boy told his brother in a whisper. "But she's almost buried in the snow."

"And how'll we get her back to-night?" demanded Billy, anxiously.

"I'm afraid we're not likely to."

"Who knows what will happen to the *Follow Me* away out here? Crickey, Dan! let's stay and watch her."

But they could not do that. In the first place, the girls would not hear of it.

"You stay here, Dan Speedwell?" gasped Mildred. "No, indeed! You mustn't!"

"Why, I'll never speak to you again if you don't go back to town with us, Billy," declared Lettie, with quite as much emphasis.

"You can see just how we stand with these young ladies, Parker," broke in the jolly sheriff.

"The Speedwell boys forever! And I don't know but the girls are about right. We wouldn't have got this bunch if it hadn't been for the boys.

"Besides, what they tell me makes me believe that this adventure has been a very fortunate one indeed. These men were after those buried plates and the other evidence. They have maltreated this poor chap," and he put his hand on Dummy's shoulder. "Tom Davis, here, undoubtedly heard about the buried box before he left the penitentiary. Some of his pals are already there, and prisoners have ways of circulating intelligence.

"Tom, here, got these other two blacklegs to help him, and they thought they'd make a get-away with the box. Now we'll take that box along with us to Riverdale."

Dummy and Dan went to the stranded iceboat

again and brought back the ironbound box. It was all they cared to stagger under in that storm.

As soon as Dummy had been made to understand who the sheriff was, he made no objection to giving up the box. Indeed, he seemed glad to be quit of the responsibility.

"And let me tell you, there is a reward coming to somebody for the recovery of that box, if not for the arrest of these three fellows," said Sheriff Kimball. "I shall see to it that this poor lad gets his share."

"Well, we may say that *this* ill wind is going to blow somebody good, then," remarked Mr. Parker. "But I believe it is blowing harder than ever, Kimball. Do you know where we are?"

The sheriff had little idea; but Dan knew. His compass came into play and they found that the horses had really headed around and were going up stream again when they made their halt.

"We certainly got well turned around," admitted the county clerk.

"Now, you see, Pa!" exclaimed Lettie. "You big men would have dragged us around in the snow all night, and we'd been lost, and frozen up tight maybe——"

"I don't see that your boy knights are going to do much better," returned Mr. Parker, rather grimly. "This is a bad storm. I wish we had never left that farmhouse, Kimball."

"So do I," admitted the sheriff.

"We can't all pile into this sleigh—the horses can scarcely draw it as it is. That box is a weight, and no mistake."

"I say, sir," said Dan to the sheriff, again consulting the compass. "I know we can get to John Bromley's dock, all right. It is a good distance, but as long as we know which way to head, we're bound to bring up there if we keep near enough the shore."

"Sensibly said, boy," agreed Parker.

"I'll walk ahead of the horses. You can't get them out of a walk, anyway," pursued Dan. "You folks get into the sleigh again, and let those fellows walk behind. Billy and Dummy will see that they don't fall out of the procession."

The sheriff made one amendment to this. He refused to ride in the sleigh, but made Mr. Parker and the girls snuggle down under the robes. He declared he preferred to keep moving, anyway, and he led the colts himself.

They acted better with him at their heads, for the poor beasts were frightened and pretty well winded. Thus the procession started—and there were no stragglers. The dummy and Billy Speedwell saw to that.

They were all tired and half-blinded by the snow and wind; but the work kept their blood in

circulation. Those afoot were better off than Mr. Parker and the girls.

The three prisoners suffered a good deal before long. It is not easy to walk at any time with one's hands tied behind one's back; but to wade through knee-deep snowdrifts under those conditions is very hard indeed.

The cords around their wrists stopped the circulation, too; and the men were in danger of suffering frost-bitten hands. Tom Davis, the ex-convict and the ugliest man in the trio, was the quickest to suffer and make his suffering known.

Like every other bully, he was a coward. He had invented the way to torture Dummy when they desired to know where the hidden box lay, and he had exulted in the lad's pain. But he could not have held out against the scorching for a minute.

Now he begged and pleaded with Billy to loosen his bonds. He even cried and declared his hands would "freeze and drop off."

"Then, by crickey!" exclaimed young Speedwell, "you'll be able to keep them out of other people's pockets. Get on with you!" and he poked the fellow in the back with his stick.

"It was all right when you tied us up and left us to starve, or freeze in that cave on the island," pursued Master Billy. "You might have known you were bound to get yours."

Tom blubbered along, stumbling through the snow, and even his mates scorned him.

They were not a pleasant party, to say the least. Once or twice one of the prisoners fell. Billy and Dummy helped him up again; and they were sure that the cords held. The guards did not neglect their captives at any stage of the game.

The procession moved slowly on, Dan in the lead. He brought them in near to the high bank of the Colasha. There were farmhouses somewhere along the riverside; but the bank was so steep that it would have been very difficult to get the horses up to the highway. Furthermore, in this blinding snowstorm, it was impossible to see a light.

They struggled on with a desperate attempt at cheerfulness, shouting encouragement to each other, and trying to be brave. But the snow was piling into such drifts against the shore that it was scarcely possible for them to win through.

"Don't know but we'll have to strike out on to the clearer ice again, sir," suggested Dan to Mr. Kimball.

"Where'd you find a piece of cleared ice—unless you cleared it yourself?" grumbled the sheriff. "This is a *nice* mess!"

"It's tough on the team," admitted Dan. "But I reckon we'll pull through after a fashion."

"I admire your pluck, lad," grunted the sheriff. "And it's one o'clock right now!"

"Then we ought to be somewhere near old John's. He can't be very far ahead—— There! isn't that a light?"

"Where?" exclaimed the sheriff, excitedly.

"Dead ahead. Don't you see? It's moving! I believe that's the little searchlight we rigged on Bromley's wharf. Yes, sir! The good old fellow! He's hoping we will see it—Billy and I—and be able to get back in the iceboat."

"Iceboat!" snorted the sheriff. "You've a fat chance of ever seeing your iceboat tied up at this dock again until the snow goes away."

"Well, now!" exclaimed Dan, with some emphasis. "You just watch. Billy and I don't propose to let our *Follow Me* lie out there on the river for very long. We're going to win the races next week in that boat, and don't you forget it!"

"I wish I had your hope, boy," grunted the county officer. "Come up, Dandy! What's the matter with you, Poke?"

It was the light on Bromley's dock. The old boatman had recovered from the rough usage he had received at the hands of the three robbers, and was out on the watch for the Speedwell boys.

To say he was surprised at the appearance of

the procession is to but faintly express old John's emotions.

"Strike my colors!" he ejaculated. "This is the beatenest thing I ever see. And I'd made up my mind that Master Dan and Billy had got into trouble this time for sure."

"And you were quite right—we did," admitted Dan, tenderly arranging the bandages on his wrists.

"And you got them sculpins?" said the boatman, eyeing the three exhausted captives with much disfavor. "Well! the rest of you pile into my house an' git warm. Let them fellers stay out here and freeze a bit more."

But he was not as bad as all that. Old John opened the fishhouse and built a fire in the little stove there, and soon the three prisoners were getting warm, too.

Mr. Parker telephoned to his home and to Dr. Kent's and so relieved the anxiety of the girls' mothers. Dan called up his own house and caught his father just before he started for the barn to get the milk truck ready.

"Though, in this storm, it is lucky if we get around. I shall take Bob and Betty, rather than the motor truck," said Mr. Speedwell. "Your mother says to bring that poor boy home with you. We must look after him."

"And I tell you," said the enthusiastic Billy,

to Mildred and Lettie, "Dummy is going to 'get in good'—don't you forget that! Sheriff Kimball says there will be several hundred dollars coming to him."

"If there's any chance of a doctor's helping him your father will know, Mildred," said Dan. "Make him promise to come out and see Dummy just as soon as he can."

"I will," Mildred declared. "He is a real nice boy, I think. "And if he learns to talk and goes to school——"

"Oh, he'll do all of that!" promised Dan. "We'll see to it, Billy and I."

"Do see that he gets a new name—or a better one, at least," suggested Lettie Parker. "Anybody would be handicapped with such a nickname as *he* has had."

CHAPTER XXIV

“IT’S A RINGER!”

It was proved that the nephew of the wild Harry Biggin *had* a proper name of his own. His unfortunate and ignorant parents had never allowed a doctor to see the boy when he was small, or the discovery that Dr. Kent made as soon as he examined the patient would have resulted in a simple operation and a change for the better in the boy’s speech.

He had been properly named Albert Biggin. He was not at all a backward boy, save in speech. And he showed his gratitude to the Speedwells in every way possible.

The doctor kindly went with him to the hospital at Compton, and aided in the operation that gave Bert Biggin the proper use of his tongue. Afterward, when the wound was well, he returned to the Speedwell farm, and there went to work cheerfully to repay the boys and their parents for their kindness to him.

He was to make his home with them, and the sheriff put the part of the reward offered for the recovery of the “treasure box,” which rightfully

belonged to "Dummy," into the bank in his name.

The three fellows who were captured later were punished by the law for their work. Out of the adventure in the blizzard a number of good things sprang.

But this is somewhat ahead of our story. The morning after the great snowstorm was a busy time for Dan and Billy Speedwell. Although the storm ceased and the sun broke through the clouds, they were worried about the motor ice-boat that the robbers had abandoned up the river. Before noon the brothers, with their new chum, started up the river road on the lookout for the lost boat.

"It's all right to have the *Fly-up-the-Creek* over there at Island Number One. We know where *she* is," said Billy. "But if any of the fellows got hold of the other——"

"Barrington Spink, for instance?" suggested Dan.

"Crickey, Dan! I believe he found those plans of yours. Jim Stetson declares that Barry and that mechanic of his are building a regular wonder of an iceboat. He's going to call it the *Streak o' Light*."

"Well, we can't help that," returned his brother, gruffly. "If he beats us, he beats us! That's all there is to it."

"But it isn't fair if he has based his construction on your invention."

"Humph!" grunted Dan. "I won't be the first inventor who has been beaten out of his rights; will I?"

They spied the mast of the motor iceboat after a long tramp. She was nearly a mile from the bank of the river.

They hired a pair of horses from the neighboring farmer, and got down on the ice and out to the stranded boat.

"Won't be much more iceboating on the Colasha this winter if this snow remains," Billy declared.

"Don't you be too sure of that," returned Dan. "If there comes a slight thaw, and *then* she freezes—Wow?"

"My goodness me!" gasped Billy, seeing the prospect at once. "Then she'll be all 'thank-you-ma'ams' and the boats will bound like rubber balls. Say! if that happens there's bound to be some fun."

They dug the *Follow Me* out of the snowdrift, and dragged her ashore after taking down the mast and stowing the frozen sail. The motor and engine had not been hurt as far as the boys could see.

They dragged the iceboat back to John Bromley's dock on a sledge, and by that time it was

dark. One of the boys stayed with Bromley each night after that until the day of the races.

For the regatta, so long looked forward to, was held on the date appointed. On Christmas night there was a rise in the temperature and a gentle rain. In the morning around went the wind again to the northwest, and the mercury went down to almost the zero mark. The snow-covered river was a glare of icy crust.

The boats were soon out in full force, although the skating was not good. For the first time the boys learned just what it meant to maneuver an iceboat on a rough surface.

Dan and Billy, with the help of Bert Biggin, dug out the *Fly-up-the-Creek* on the shore of Island Number One, and took the girls to Karnac Lake the day before the regatta.

Mildred and Lettie had enjoyed the sport before; but although the breeze was light, the big iceboat got under great headway coming home, and when she leaped from the summit of a particularly big hummock of snow-ice, and did not touch a runner to the surface for forty feet, the girls thought they had come as near to flying as they ever wished to.

"And do you mean to say you believe you can get greater speed out of your new boat than *this*, Dannie?" panted Lettie Parker. "Why! I can't believe it."

"To-morrow will tell the story," returned Dan, grimly.

"The boys say that *Streak o' Light* Barry Spink has built is just a wonder," said Mildred, anxiously.

"Well, of course," returned Dan, seriously, "I can't tell what Barry has built. But it's got to be a good one to beat our *Follow Me*, now that we have overhauled her and adjusted her again—eh, Billy?"

"Believe me!" agreed his enthusiastic brother, "it's some boat, girls. Wait till you see it."

The Speedwell boys sailed their new invention down to the Boat Club Cove the morning of the regatta, using only her canvas. Barrington Spink and his foreign looking mechanic were running the new boat Spink had built all about the cove to show her paces, using, of course, only the motor. She did not go so very fast, but the owners of ordinary iceboats looked on the *Streak o' Light* with envy.

"Say!" grunted Monroe Stevens; "we haven't the ghost of a show with that thing. And Mr. Darrington's got a power boat, too. What have you got under that canvas, Dan?"

"Never mind," said the older Speedwell boy. "We'll show our engine after the races—not before."

But the brothers went over to Spink's boat and

examined it. Barry seemed very nervous and eyed the Speedwells askance while Dan was closely examining the mechanism that drove the *Streak o' Light*.

"What do you think of it, Dan?" asked Mr. Darringford, who was standing near.

"I—don't—know," returned the boy, and backed away from the machine. Billy followed him, his face red and his hands clenched.

"It's a ringer! It's a ringer!" the younger boy declared, hotly. "He stole those plans——"

"He merely found them on the ice and picked them up," put in Dan, quietly.

"And made use of them!" ejaculated Billy, almost choked for speech in his anger.

"Yes," observed Dan, slowly. "He seems to have made *some* use of the idea."

"And if he beats us, it will be because of our plans—your invention, Dan!"

"Hold on! don't blow up!" warned Dan. "The race isn't run yet."

"And if it is——"

"He's got to show he knows how to run his boat better than we run ours; hasn't he?" Dan demanded. "Keep your shirt on, Billy."

Thus admonished, the younger Speedwell kept silent. Barry Spink raced his *White Albatross* in the early races, and he actually won two of the short ones.

"That chap thinks he's going to sweep the whole river," growled Biff Hardy. "He's sent up to Appleyard's for a broom and is going to tie it to his masthead."

"Oh, Dan! is he really going to beat everybody—win everything?" cried Mildred Kent.

"Wait," advised Speedwell. "These are only play races. There's only one real trial of speed to-day; and the *Follow Me* is going to be in that," and he laughed.

But Billy didn't feel like laughing at all. He didn't have much share of Dan's courage.

CHAPTER XXV

BEATING THE "STREAK O' LIGHT."

THE race Dan referred to was the actual trial of the big craft, and those rigged with motors. The course was to Karnac Lake and return. If the wind held light and fair it was anybody's race; if it fell calm, undoubtedly the motor ice-boats would have an advantage. If the wind increased to a gale there was no knowing who would be the successful one.

Since the big snow nobody knew the course well. The river's surface was like a rolling plain—a prairie. There was known to be no open water; but otherwise the course was uncertain.

There were five starters. Monroe Stevens would not race his *Redbird*, nor did the *Curlew* start. The Speedwells', Barry Spink's, Mr. Darrington's *Betty B.*, an entry from Meadville, and one from Barrington, made up the "card."

It was a long course, and it called for very good handling to go straight up the river, turn, and make the downward course in any sort of time. The five boats drifted out of the cove

under sail and got in some sort of a line so that the referee could start them.

At once Spink's mechanic started his engine; but the motors on the *Betty B.* and on the Speedwell craft remained silent. The signal was given and they all got off in some sort of time.

The Speedwells paid strict attention to their own work, and did not watch their rivals. If one is going to race, the way to do so is to attend strictly to one's own business.

Dan and Billy knew that there was one bad obstacle—the Long Bridge. Although the masts all cleared the under-timbers of the high structure, the canvas was almost sure to lose the wind while going under.

Spink had gone at it just as he went at everything—with marvelous confidence. With motor sputtering and his big sail bellied full, he shot ahead of the other four boats in the race and was quickly at the Long Bridge.

Here he had to drop the sail, for it interfered with the *Streak o' Light* getting through. His motor coughed and the iceboat went ahead jerkily enough.

Dan and Billy had taken a rather long shoot to windward; now the *Follow Me* came up to the bridge on the other tack, and Dan started the motor just before his sail began to shake.

The momentum they had gathered carried the

boat under the structure. At once the sail filled on the upper side, and the *Follow Me* proved her name to be good. She led the five iceboats, and the crowd of spectators that crowded the bridge cheered the Speedwell boys as their craft darted up the river.

It was not until then that she began to really move.

The boys had sailed pretty fast in her before. But now the whole stretch of the river lay before her. There was nothing in the way, and the wind was fair. Under the pressure of both wind and claw-wheel under the main beam, she hit only the high places, as Billy declared.

Dan tried to steer clear of the higher drifts; but sometimes she would run up the long slope of a hummock and shoot right out into the air. Those on shore could see the daylight between the runners of the *Follow Me* and the crust of ice.

At such times Dan was glad he had rigged his sprocket wheel so that he could raise her. The motor raced, but the moment the runners connected with the ice again, Dan drove the wheel down and the added impetus of the whirling claws aided in the speed of the boat.

Billy hung to the end of the crossbeam and laughed back at the other boats. He could afford to. Even Barry Spink's wonderful craft

200 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

was being left behind. Before they passed the end of Island Number One, the *Follow Me* was a mile and more in the lead.

And the boys kept this lead for the entire distance to Karnac Lake. When they turned the stake and started to beat back, the pace was more moderate. But here was where Dan's invention "made good."

The wind was against them. To tack from side to side of the river as the sailboats did was to lose precious time. They furled the sail, unstepped the mast, and speeded up the engines of the *Follow Me*.

The machinery worked splendidly. Sometimes, when there was a catspaw of good wind, one or another of the other contestants would get somewhere near Dan and Billy; but the moment the wind shifted, or died down, the motor iceboat scurried ahead.

They never saw Spink's boat after passing her at Karnac Lake. Mr. Darrington's *Betty B.* clung to the *Follow Me* for a long while; but finally she fell back. The boys were far, far ahead when they came down to the Long Bridge again.

In spite of the extreme cold, there was a goodly crowd to greet them. The Academy boys and girls "rooted" loudly for the brothers and their craft. The *Follow Me* slid under the bridge and

so down to the starting point amid the plaudits of half of Riverdale and, as Billy said, "a good sprinkling of the rest of the county."

Mr. Darringford, when he came in, a poor second, wanted to make a thorough examination of Dan's invention, and the boys were glad to have him do so. He at once advised Dan to cover his ingenious work with a patent, and helped the boy do this at once.

"For people are bound to see and steal your idea," said the gentleman, convinced that young Speedwell was quite a genius in mechanics.

"Huh! they've done that already—but it didn't help 'em much," scoffed Billy.

"You mean that Spink and his foreigner?" asked Mr. Darringford, with a queer little smile.

"Yes. He stole those plans from Dan."

Mr. Darringford looked at the older Speedwell and smiled again. "I guess you saw what he did?" he said. "*I* can see that he tried to steal your idea; but he seems to have got it hind-end foremost—eh?"

"That's what I noticed," laughed Dan. "So I wasn't much afraid of his beating us out."

The story of what Barry Spink had done, and how he had overreached himself, leaked out, and the boys and girls of Riverdale fairly laughed the fellow out of town. Barry never entered the Riverdale Academy; but Bert Biggin did.

202 SPEEDWELLS AND THEIR ICE RACER

And Bert proved himself to be a pretty smart fellow, despite the nickname of "Dummy" that had clung to him for so many years.

That winter on the Colasha may never be repeated; but while the ice lasted, Dan and Billy, with their friends, managed to enjoy every hour they could get upon the frozen surface of the stream.

And none of those who bore a part in the incident will forget how they were lost in the great blizzard.

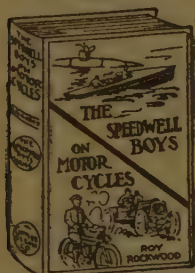
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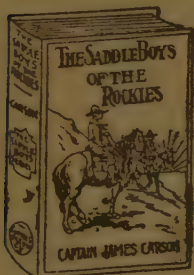
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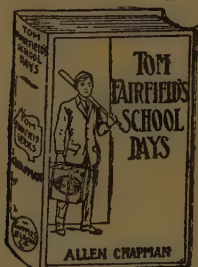
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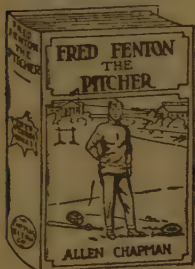
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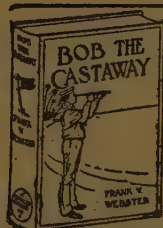
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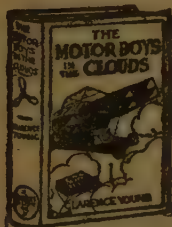
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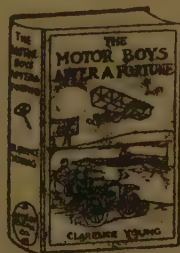
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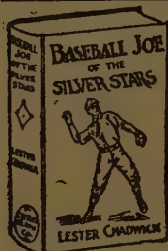
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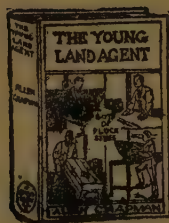
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